# THE SOUL OF LEADERSHIP: AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN HISTORICALLY BLACK AND PREDOMINANTLY WHITE ORGANIZATIONS

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study addresses African American students' leadership experiences at predominantly White institutions. Findings indicated participants utilized servant leadership in historically Black organizations and transformational leadership in predominantly White organizations. The differences displayed showed that participants' leadership perceptions and behaviors were influenced by the racial micro-organizational climates experienced. Emergent themes were: 1) Resistant apathy; 2) Blackness as benefit; 3) Positional responsibility; and 4) Leader efficacy enhancement. Ultimately, participants adjusted the ways in which they enacted leadership, mentored followers and defined leading based on the organizational context.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Jesus

To my African ancestors

To my wife: Nedra L. Hotchkins

To my children: Osiris, Yssis and Zion

To my families: extended, fictive and professorial

To my supportive, encouraging parents: Doris, Eady and James

To March Onward and Upward Toward the Light of Knowledge

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the last century numerous studies have examined the lived experiences of African American students attending historically White higher education campuses (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Fleming, 1984; Guiffrida, 2005; Harper, Carini, Bridges & Hayek, 2004; Lyons, 1973; Roach, 2001). Other researchers have examined the experiences of African American students pertaining to the intersection of race and organizational leadership within predominantly White college contexts (Arminio, et al., 2000; Fleming, 1984; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005; Museus, 2008). In terms of conducting studies about college student leadership, research with majority White participants has led to the creation of leadership models that measure social change in leadership development and relational leadership, which can also be applied to African American students (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 1996; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006; Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 2006). In each of these leadership models, student leaders believe in their ability to lead, which is a component of their development and ability to enact leadership. This belief,

although not formally classified as efficacy, is central to a student's continued desire to serve in leadership capacities.

The link between efficacy and leadership has been explored (Chemers, 1997; Hollenbeck & Hall, 2004; McCormick, 2001; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006); however, there are sparse data related to leader efficacy (Hannah, 2006; Hendricks & Payne, 2007; Murphy & Ensher, 1999; Singer, 1991; Taggar & Seijts, 2003). Furthermore, there is little research available that examines the influence of organizational context on leader efficacy (Eden, 2001; Eden & Sulimani, 2002; Hoyt, 2005) and absolutely no such research examines the influence of organizational context on African American student leader efficacy. As a result of this research gap policy-makers and student affairs practitioners are uninformed about the variety of African American students' leadership experiences despite higher education becoming increasingly diverse with leadership opportunities that involve heterogeneous student constituencies (Chin, 2010). Consequently, it is necessary to analyze the leadership experiences of African American students across varying higher educational contexts; both generally and to include specific institutional locations and campus racial climates. Doing so better informs college personnel like organization advisors who are responsible for facilitating leadership opportunities for students including those who are African American. This study places greater focus on African American student leadership experiences to examine the influential nature of organizational type on African American student leader efficacy.

According to Hannah et al. (2008) leadership efficacy is defined as an individual's internal beliefs related to their ability to be successful in the leadership

process, which can be positively or negatively influenced by a variety of factors including organizational context. More importantly, when organizational and institutional contexts overlap (e.g., historically White versus historically Black colleges and universities) it is imperative to consider not only how students perceive their collegiate environments, but also the extent to which those institutions' campus climates are welcoming of Black students' cultural norms, values and behaviors (Hurdato, 1994). Indeed, while it is true that historically Black organizations often act as ethnic enclaves where African American students can embrace their racial identities and avoid racism (Yancey, 2003), it is also true that predominantly White organizations can reinforce the positive experiences of African American student leaders who are involved in organizations on campus (Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005). In part, African American students join historically Black organizations to promote their persistence when other venues are unavailable (Harper & Quaye, 2007), as well as provide themselves with leadership experiences that cultivates their professional development (Patitu, Bonner II, Tejeda & Williams, 2009) while enhancing valuable social and cognitive abilities gained through human interaction, critical thought and relationship building.

In recent literature concerning how leaders lead in organizations, transformational leadership (Burns, 1978) is positioned as occurring when "the leader inspires followers to see the attractive future state, while communicating expectations and demonstrating a commitment to goals and a shared vision" (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004, p. 351). This way of leading is based on the notion of relationship building as central to the accomplishment of organizational goals due to a leader's ability to create opportunities for mutually beneficial interactions within their organization. In part, Burns' (1978)

transformational leadership leans toward positive organizational change, noting that transformational leaders promote accomplishing a shared vision to achieve a higher group goal. In contrast, leaders who place the needs of organizational members before themselves are referred to as servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1977); in fact, "a great leader is seen as servant first" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 21). Specifically, "servant leadership takes place when leaders assume the position of servant in their relationships with fellow workers" (Russell & Stone, 2002, p. 145). These types of selfless (i.e., follower-centered) and group agenda (i.e., organization-centered) interactions spark leadership that ultimately creates change whether at the individual or organizational level. Additionally, because leadership occurs on a continuum (Bass & Avolio, 1994) it is plausible to consider a leader capable of leading in multiple ways including transformational and as a servant—this is the case in this study.

As policy-makers and student affairs practitioners create opportunities that facilitate student leadership on predominantly White institutions (PWIs) campuses, it is necessary to consider the importance of theory-based outcomes prior to program design (Komives & Schoper, 2006). Specifically, in understanding the role programming plays in student organizations, it is imperative to note how African American students have served in leadership capacities on both historically black college and university (HBCU) and PWI campuses to both their cultural benefit and detriment (Allen, 1986; Cuyjet, 2006; Ervin, 2001; Feagin, 1992; Fleming, 1984). Whether the modes of their leadership involved participating in civil rights activism or leading student government associations, serving in student organizations has facilitated the engagement of African American students regardless of institutional type. This is important because student organizations

influence how students experience collegiate environments and to a degree facilitate their academic and social integration, as well as levels of involvement (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1993).

When examining the ways in which African American students are involved in institutions of higher education, it is important to note numerous institutional impediments, such as legacy admissions policies that benefit the descendants of college graduates and act to impede the access and success of African American students. To illustrate, according to Bowen and Bok (1998) "almost all selective institutions give some advantage in the admissions process to applicants whose parents or other family members attended the institution (often called "legacies"), and many also pay special attention to applications from children of faculty and staff" (p. 24). Once they are admitted into institutions of higher education, as a point of engagement, historically Black, culturally affirming organizations have served as social and academic support systems for African American students (Fleming, 1984; Guiffrida, 2005; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Furthermore, student organizations provide a vital role in facilitating the support of African American students by serving as places for the development of multicultural "fictive kinships" (Hirt & Herndon, 2004), which extend beyond African American familial cultural boundaries.

**Studies addressing the problem**

The significance of students having the option to join both historically Black and predominantly White student organizations as points of involvement, must not be trivialized. As stated previously, these organizations promote the inclusion and

acceptance of African American students into the college environment and institution (Jackson & Moore, 2006; Lett & Wright, 2003), which presents yet another reason for PWIs to invest in building nourishing mechanisms that serve as catalysts for African American student involvement and persistence. According to Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998), historically Black organizations such as Black Greek-Letter Organizations (BGLOs), serve as benefactors of unique learned cultural leadership experiences and opportunities for African American students. Guiffrida (2003) found that ethnic, same-race organizations also served as catalysts for cultural, professional and social integration throughout students' college experiences. Museus (2008) imparted the notion that ethnic student organizations serve as enablers by providing a significant place of cultural familiarity amidst dominant cultural impediments, which are rarely affirming, supportive or inclusive.

In a broader organizational context, the value of race-specific organizations is described in a variety of studies including that of Person and Christensen (1996) who found multicultural organizations provided a sense of mattering and belonging for African American students who felt isolated and alienated. Similarly, Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) found that African American students believe membership in multicultural organizations allows for opportunities to hone leadership skills and abilities that will ultimately be shared with the Black community. Harper and Quaye (2007) found that ethnic organizations facilitated the Black identity development of African American males, and taught them the art of cross-cultural communication with other races in preparation to enter mainstream organizations. Studies like these align with Astin's (1984) student involvement theory, which posited that when students identify with the

college environment it is easier for them to become involved, even if the identification is within ethnic, same-race, or multicultural organizations. In part, the relevance of these nearly homogenous organizations is their insular, buffering nature, which aids in shielding students from racial prejudice, perceptions of racial tension, racism-based stressors, assimilation versus cultural pluralism, and ultimately how race is defined and viewed on campus (Blumer, 1958; Hurtado, 1992; Smith, 2004; Winant, 2000; Yancey, 2003).

Although the aforementioned studies are informative, historically Black and multicultural student organizations are not the sole sources of cultural or institutional immersion for African American student leaders. The seminal research study exploring how students of color experience leadership in same race, multiracial and predominantly White organizations (Arminio, et al., 2000) highlights African American perspectives, as well as those of other students of color. These authors found that participants experienced distinct differences concerning group loyalty over individual needs, gender differences in leadership experiences and a lack of campus staff and faculty role models. Interestingly, the differences were based on organizations' racial make-up, type and peer leaders. Although the qualitative study by Arminio, et al. (2000) yielded valuable findings, none of the participants were members of multiple organizations, which framed their leadership experience as limited to one organization. This dissertation research study examined the leadership experiences of African American students in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations to determine how these different micro-organizational racial contexts influence leader efficacy. This unexplored gap in the literature has yet to extend across organizational type and institutional type. The findings

serve to educate the academy about African American student leaders by determining why these students join historically Black and predominantly White organizations, as well as how leading and membership in each influences their leader efficacy.

**Deficiencies in previous studies**

Empirical data gathered in previous studies (Fleming, 1984; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus, 2008) positions African American student organizational involvement as based on a variety of supportive factors including racial comfort, feelings of "fitting in," positive identity development and even as a platform for cultural growth and expression. Despite extending the literature about a variety of organizational African American student experiences, many of these studies neglected to disaggregate experiences by leadership efficacy, development, and perceptions across a variety of organizational contexts. As such, a minimal literature base examines organizational type, race as an influence on leadership development and student perceptions of leadership (Arminio, et. al, 2000; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005; Renn & Ozaki, 2010). Of these, only Arminio, et. al (2000) examined students of colors' experiences in a variety of organizational contexts and none of these studies focus solely on African American participants. In an effort to document the leadership experiences of African American students, specifically those students who are simultaneously leaders in historically Black and predominantly White student organizations, this study aims to inform knowledge about how leading in each type of organization influences leadership efficacy within the context of two research-extensive PWI campuses.

**Importance of the study**

Qualitative exploration of how African American student leaders experience leadership within historically Black and predominantly White organizations is important because it focuses on how participants lead in these contextually different spaces, as well as the extent to which their leader efficacy is affected. In examining this phenomenon, the campus racial climate theory of Hurtado, et al. (1998) is applied to examine the historical and structural elements of both historically Black versus predominantly White organizations, as well as the psychological perceptions and behaviors of students who lead in each. The intent was to determine how distinct organizational differences influenced participants' ways of leading while negotiating each micro-organizational racial climate. Hurtado (1994), focusing on Latino students, stated "students who are strongly committed to the personal goal of helping to promote racial understanding on campus are likely to report having experienced discrimination on campus" (p. 33), which speaks to the challenges students experience when attempting to gain equity or equality on PWI campuses. This framework served to inform this study's exploration of how African American student leaders serve followers while aspiring to transform organizations by enacting selfless, purposeful leadership intended to empower followers and create change by challenging organizational perceptions of Black students. Specifically, this study examines how interactions with members, based on the micro-organizational racial context, impact African American leaders, their leader efficacy and on-campus involvement. This study informs educational policy and research that focuses on supporting African American student leaders.

To examine shared lived phenomenon across institutional context, I employed a

comparative case study approach. Comparative case study is utilized when collecting in depth information through multiple sources to understand participants' situation and meaning while "closing in" on their life situations (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Merriam, 1998). Although this research informs the academy at large, I am mindful that "the goal of a case study is not to generalize the results to all institutions of higher education since the case is influenced by a number of specific and unique factors" (Perna, et al., 2009, p. 6). Therefore, this comparative case study contributes to the discussion about individualized African American student leadership experiences occurring at historically White institutional campuses within historically Black versus predominantly White organizations.

Understanding African American student leaders' lived experiences within these organizations, as well as the impact on their leader efficacy will help policy-makers, student affairs practitioners and those who oversee student leadership develop creative ways to assess micro-organizational racial climates before encouraging African American students to lead on campus. This should not only facilitate the participation of African American students in leadership roles, but also positively contribute to their academic and social involvement and their persistence (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1993). Furthermore, this study informs current literature concerning transformative (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Burns, 1978) and servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977, Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004).

**Purpose statement**

The purpose of this study is to improve our understanding of how leadership and leader efficacy are experienced by African American student leaders in historically Black

and predominantly White student organizations. To achieve this, I engaged 12 African American student leaders, who individually serve as separate units of case study analysis, at two research extensive institutions located in the Midwest. In depth interviews, organizational observations and focus groups allowed me to determine: (a) the meanings they ascribe to their experience of contextual leadership (e.g., historically Black versus predominantly White organizations); and (b) the variables they credit with their leadership efficacy. This study explored the following research questions:

1) What motivates African American students to join historically Black and predominantly White organizations?
2) How do African American students experience being leaders in historically Black and predominantly White organizations?
3) How is African American student leader efficacy influenced by leadership in historically Black and predominantly White organizations?

**Definitions**

This section offers terminology that is used throughout the dissertation study. *Historically Black organizations* are defined as organizations created by Black students with the purpose of the academic and social uplift of African American students. Although *Black* and *African American* are not typically synonymous, based on the responses of participants, as well as how they framed themselves as self-identifying with both terms, for the purpose of this study the two terms are used interchangeably. Specifically, *Black* and *African American* means American born people(s) of African descent (Jackson, 2001). *Predominantly White organizations* are defined as organizations

that maintain a majority constituency of White members. *Micro-organizational climate* is defined as participants' perceptions of the cultural and leadership environments of their organizations; typically seen as either negative or positive.

**Chapter summary**

In this study, student affairs practitioners, faculty and administrators are provided with the necessary insight and recommendations to facilitate the participation of African American student leaders in leadership roles throughout historically White institutions. In the context of the study, the effects of micro-organizational environments on participants are discussed; specifically, how they influence leadership development, and the ways in which participants engage constituencies and see themselves as leaders. The study contributes to academe by offering an understanding of why African American student leaders choose to be involved in leadership roles on campus and their motivations for becoming engaged. The study also illustrates the benefits of participating as a leader within racially and contextually different student organizations.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature pertaining to African American college student leadership and involvement. The chapter also details campus racial climate theory of Hurtado, et al. (1998) and Engberg and Hurtado (2011), which frames the study. Additionally, the history of leadership theories is highlighted, specifically focusing on servant and transformational leadership. Lastly, an examination of how African Americans experience being Black in academe is presented.

In Chapter 3, the study's qualitative methodological approach is described in detail. Specifically, the qualitative rationale, paradigms guiding the research, researcher

as instrument, study context, participants, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness criteria, ethical considerations, confidentiality and limitations are presented.

Chapter 4 provides detailed profiles of the study's participants for the purpose of allowing readers to understand their backgrounds. These profiles grant readers an intimate understanding of participants' demographic data, and provide individualized perspectives of these student leaders.

In Chapter 5, study findings are presented and the following emergent themes are described: 1) resistant empathy; 2) fluidity of Blackness; 3) positional responsibility; and 4) leader efficacy enhancement. Additionally, alternative narratives illustrate for readers the fullness of participants' experiences as leaders, as well as the variety therein.

In Chapter 6, study findings are discussed and related to current literature. Furthermore, implications for student affairs practitioners, faculty and administrators are discussed in addition to applicable best practices for engaging African American student leaders, and recommendations for future research.

# CHAPTER II

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Why do African American students, who attend predominantly White institutional campuses, join historically Black and predominantly White student organizations? What contributes to the development of African American student leader efficacy? How do African American students' experiences as leaders contribute to their motivations to lead? What do we know about how being in a student organization affects the retention of African American students? Where is the literature bereft? This chapter addresses these questions. Research concerning African American student involvement, the intersection of race and leadership, African American student racial identity, and leadership theory is discussed.

First, literature exploring the historical and current context of higher education, as experienced by African American students, is highlighted. Second, I explore the intersection of African Americans in higher education and how "being Black" is situated within the academy and at home. Third, African American student involvement is discussed with a focus on social and academic campus engagement including

membership in student organizations whether in elected positions or as general members. Fourth, I examine literature related to the history of servant and transformational leadership, as well as related leadership theories. The selected theoretical framework and a supplemental contextual study are explained in effort to frame this dissertation. Tangential student involvement frameworks are offered along with a literature rationale that further confirms how the selected literature was applied. Finally, this chapter explains the significance of the comparative case study as a point for the advancement of research concerning African American student leadership experiences on historically White higher education campuses, specifically exploring how leadership experiences influence African American student leaders' efficacy across organizational contexts.

**State of higher education**

According to recent studies focused on African American college student leadership experiences at predominantly White institutions, students are involved in a variety of organizations including student government, fraternities and sororities, ethnic, multicultural and predominantly White organizations (Arminio, et al., 2000; Harper & Quaye; 2007). African American students also participate in leadership roles at historically black colleges and universities where the outcomes include building self-reliance, positive gains in social and personal development, and increased ability to facilitate conflict resolution and build consensus in Black Greek organizations (Fleming, 1984; Flowers, 2004; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998). Regardless of the leadership context, being engaged on campus is essential to the persistence and retention of African American college students (Fleming, 1984; Harper & Quaye; 2007; Museus, 2008). In an

effort to elucidate the impact of institutional context on college student involvement, researchers have examined African American student experiences at both PWIs and HBCUs (Allen, 1987; Cheatham, Slaney, & Coleman, 1990; DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Watson & Kuh, 1996). In most instances, research concluded that where African American student cultural norms, knowledge and values were affirmed, African American students were more academically and socially adjusted, which positively impacted their success and ultimately played a role in the facilitation of their on-campus involvement and degree attainment. Consequently, for students to identify with institutional environments, they need to adjust to the campus climate (Hurtado, et al., 1998; Rankin & Reason, 2005) and develop the pluralistic skills necessary for peer interactions and association (Engberg & Hurtado, 2011).

To the aforementioned point, exploring the leadership experiences of African American students who lead in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations, while attending historically White institutions, requires the consideration of not only the organizational, but institutional context and culture. According to Kuh and Whitt (2000):

> Culture in Higher Education is defined as the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institute of higher education and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus. (p. 162)

Although this overarching culture is different at different types of institutions (e.g., historically Black, Hispanic serving or Tribal College) the way it influences behaviors is based on students' perceptions of the environment (Baird, 2001), which impact their ability to integrate academically and socially. Understanding the institutional culture is

crucial because African American students have been found to be positively affected in culturally affirmative ways while attending historically Black colleges and universities (Palmer & Gasman, 2008), and negatively in culturally invalidating ways when attending historically White institutions (Cuyjet, 2006; Fleming, 1984). While HBCUs encourage persistence through supportive faculty relationships, nurturing administrative interactions and peer encouragement (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1984; Palmer & Gasman, 2008), PWIs often jeopardize African American student persistence (Cuyjet, 2006; Feagin, 1992) providing an environment where students face institutional, individual and systemic racism and dominant norms that cause feelings of isolation, and discourage persistence.

Tierney (1992) argued that institutional culture has an adverse impact on the ability of students of color to prosper in college because higher education is a reflection of the dominant culture, which is White. Specifically, "to assume that colleges and universities do not reflect the culture of mainstream society is to overlook the crucial importance of the sociocultural contexts surrounding postsecondary organizations" (Tierney, 1992, p. 608). Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) considered historically White institutions as detrimental to African American students, as well as other groups of color, due to historical and contemporary racialized infrastructures, current racial campus culture and a campus ecology that benefits White students. Smith, et al. (2007) found that African American male participants experienced Black misandry and racial microaggressions, which negatively contributed to perceptions that "their" historically White institutional collegiate environments were hostile, unwelcoming and adversarial. According to Hurtado, et al. (1998) the collegiate environment consists of historical, structural, psychological and behavioral dimensions, which influence educational

outcomes (i.e., persistence) depending on how students experience the college environment. Although this conceptual view of institutional climate is positioned as operating at the macrolevel, I posit that the racial campus climate also exists at the microlevel within spaces such residential housing, study groups and student organizations.

While Yancey (2003) positioned student organizations as ethnic enclaves where African American students can embrace their racial identities, Museus and Quaye (2009) viewed ethnic student organizations as cultural enclaves capable of facilitating:

> connections of sufficient quality and quantity with collective and individual cultural agents to facilitate their [students of color] adjustment, engagement, and eventual persistence through college. The greater the quality and quantity of students' connections with various cultural agents on campus, the more likely they are to succeed (p. 84).

Although I concur with the significance of ethnic or cultural enclaves, the need for such enclaves stems from students of colors' desire to find on-campus spaces where they see themselves represented positively, can be their culturally authentic selves and experience mattering versus marginality by being seen as depended upon (Rosenburg & McCullough, 1981; Schlossberg, 1989). Specifically, it is my belief that these desires stem from being immersed within campus environments where their cultural perspectives, values and behaviors are not normalized and play out within the institutional culture as negative. Moreover, ethnic student organizations could be used by African American students to navigate the racial campus climate on both macro- and microlevels through involvement in leadership roles that facilitates their growth as leaders and persistence.

In general, various notions of what is required for students to engage and persist

on college campuses are highlighted through differing scholarly opinions on the topic (Astin, 1984; Reason, 2009; Terenzini & Reason, 2005; Tierney, 1992; Tinto, 1993; Wiedman, 1989). The ways in which students are served in higher education has been informed by research about academic and social involvement as the lynchpin for student persistence (Astin, 1984, 1993; Tinto, 1993). In fact, the notion of who or what is responsible for individual student persistence has developed over the last 40 years assigning this responsibility to a variety of factors from an individual student's ability to socially integrate, institutional fit and precollege student backgrounds to levels of campus engagement (Astin, 1984; Reason, 2009; Terenzini & Reason, 2005; Tinto, 1993) as influences on persistence. Scholars have developed frameworks that challenge institutional ability to operate in a multicultural world where students are not expected to be acculturated by offering pluralistic ways of becoming part of higher education while pursuing degree attainment (Tierney, 1992; Weidman, 1989).

Tinto (1993) posited that student persistence hinges on their ability to accomplish a variety of transitions, which culminate in integration into the culture of a new dominant group. Tierney (1992) responded that to do this would be the equivalent of "cultural suicide" (p. 614) for students of color. To further the discussion concerning what contributes to student persistence, Braxton (2001) argued that factors such as how the institution is structured, cost benefit analysis, and the impact of college climate on student's psychological perceptions each influenced persistence, especially for students of color. Terenzini and Reason (2005) proposed that students' precollege characteristics and experiences, organizational context, student peer environment and individual experiences all affect the outcome of persistence. The comprehensive approach of Reason

(2009) differentiated persistence as a student outcome, while positioning retention as an institutional responsibility. In this view factors such as institutional behavior (e.g., enacting biased policies like legacy admittance) influence persistence indirectly, but variables like student peer environment are also impactful.

According to Hurtado (1992), if students of color perceive the campus racial climate as unwelcoming, hostile or unaccepting of their culture their persistence is negatively affected. Museus, Nichols, and Lambert (2008) found that campus racial climate affected the persistence of students of color by negatively influencing their goal commitment, and their social and academic involvement. According to Astin (1977) the extent to which students are involved in campus activities, including engagement in out-of-class activities like studying for class, increases the likelihood that they will persist. Despite the relevance of these studies, the academy is relatively still uninformed about African American undergraduate student leadership involvement, how this involvement contributes to African American students' development as leaders, how African American undergraduates experience leadership in a variety of racialized organizations, and how African American leader efficacy is influenced through the realization of organizational transformation.

For this study, leader efficacy is defined as an individual's internal beliefs relating to their ability to be successful in the leadership process (Hannah, et al., 2008). In fact, leader efficacy is "beliefs in one's abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet situational demands" (Wood & Bandura, 1989, p. 48) and is influenced by organizational context or domain. "The more diverse the domain in which leaders build efficacy beliefs, the more likely they will be able to

activate their efficacy, and will be more adaptable and effective within and across these domains" (Hannah et al., 2008, p. 7). Domains are defined as existing within and across leadership challenges, roles and contexts, which if navigated successfully impact a leader's ability to adapt and perform within organizations (Hannah, et al., 2008). Participants in this study are leaders operating across two distinctly different organizational domains, which influence how they experience leadership between and betwixt historically Black and predominantly White organizations. Due to the varied contexts it is important to note that "a leader with a wide domain of self-efficacy will by definition perceive himself or herself as more adaptable to meet a diverse array of leadership challenges" (Hannah, et al., 2008, p. 7). More importantly, participants in this study were allowed to determine their own definition of leader efficacy, which was compared to definitions in existing literature (Hannah, et al., 2008; Hendricks & Payne, 2007; Taggar & Seijts, 2003).

By outlining the higher education institutional context it is easier to understand why the campus racial climate of Hurtado, et al. (1998) and Logue, Hutchens and Hector (2005) studies were selected for this dissertation. Specifically, due to the exclusionary history African Americans have experienced with historically White institutions of higher education, including impinged access and racism experienced on campuses, it was appropriate to select a theoretical framework that allowed for an examination of campus and organizational racial climates. This overarching theoretical framework is the work of Hurtado, et al. (1998) campus racial climate, and the notion that student phenomenological leadership experiences are heavily influenced by interpersonal interactions, students' participation and awareness of their personal identities while

situated in organizations (Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005).

Overarching historic institutional context

Prior to African Americans being able to freely attend historically White institutions of higher education, without the impediment of legalized segregation, there were few educational options for post-secondary degree attainment. The close of the 19th century marked the beginning of great strides toward racial equality in the area of education, many of which were determined in the courtroom. Related directly to higher education, cases like *Bereau College v. Commonwealth of Kentucky* (1908), *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada, Registrar of the University of Missouri, et al.* (1938), *Sipuel v. Board of Regents of University of Oklahoma* (1948), *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* (1950) and *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) laid the foundation for equal access under the law. However, in less than 60 years the erosion of equal access, pertaining to affirmative action admissions policies, has been attacked and dismantled by subsequent court cases like *Ricci v. DeStefano (2009), Grutter v. Bollinger* (2003), *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003), *Hopwood v. Texas* (5th Cir. 1996), *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* (1978) and *Fisher v. University of Texas at Austin* (2012).

These cases aid in framing the relevance of institutional climates that have evolved from exclusionary to inclusionary and back again. In critical terms, the transition back to meritocratic admissions, by removing affirmative action mechanisms that account for race and/or holistic aspects of students' lives, speaks to the systemic impediments used to exclude African Americans from higher education. This litigious legacy, coupled with definitive research that speaks to how campus racial climate (Engberg & Hurtado,

2011) influences the persistence of students of color and calls for institutions to develop models for diverse learning environments in higher education, allows for the consideration of the ways in which PWIs can empower African American students. To this point, both the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University, which were sites in this study, historically practiced segregation against African Americans by not granting them admittance until losing both the *Sipuel v. Board of Regents of University of Oklahoma* (1948), and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* (1950) cases. These cases serve as reference points in documenting the educational struggle endured by African Americans and the litigious processes required to ensure degree attainment opportunities within a higher education context.

More recently, in 2005, Oklahoma's nine-member, all-White and all-male higher education board of regents suspended a graduate and professional school minority scholarship entitled the Southern Regional Education Board Minority Doctoral Scholars (SREB) program. Actions like this represent the dismantling of programs specifically enacted to address Oklahoma's past history of discrimination concerning higher education access. In broader terms, various state policies have either been under attack or served to aid in the elimination of qualifiers like race (i.e., Texas top ten percent plan, California Proposition 209 and Georgia HOPE Scholarship).

In response to the *Hopwood v. Texas* (1996) decision, which barred the use of race in college admissions within the Fifth Circuit, policy makers in Texas created House Bill 508, thereby granting college admission to the top 10% of high school graduates in the state. In part, Bill 508 was designed to counteract the loss of potential students of color and consequentially limit achieving racial and ethnic diversity across the Texas

university system. Since the creation of Bill 508, the *Fisher v. University of Texas* (2009) case was levied proclaiming it discriminated against two White female defendants based on their race and is a violation of their rights to equal protection of the laws under the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, U.S. Const, amend. XI. The case, currently under consideration by the U.S. Supreme Court, provides a clear example of an attempt to curtail previous legislation designed to grant access to underrepresented populations.

Similarly, the passage of California's Proposition 209, which eliminated the consideration of race, sex, color, ethnicity and national origin for all public education, including college admissions, employment and contracting decisions, (Chavez, 1998; Pusser, 2004) is another example of a state moving to colorblind practices that remove the consideration of difference when determining the access of previously protected groups to higher education. Tangentially, Georgia's Helping Outstanding Students Educationally (HOPE) Scholarship, which is a state financial merit-aid program for Georgia high school graduates maintaining a B average (3.0) and attending college in Georgia, has been shown to "flow disproportionately to white, non-Hispanic, upper-income students" (Dynarski, 2004, p. 82). Although this unintentional outcome significantly impacts institutions that have abandoned race-conscious policies with the hopes of not infringing on the rights of students, what has emerged, in the HOPE Scholarship instance, is the perpetuation of low college attainment for students in underrepresented groups.

Finally, the historical context of the aforementioned cases is relevant not only because it can negatively affect the persistence of African American students (Hurtado, et

al., 1998), but also because being Black, while attending PWIs is still problematic for African American students (Cuyjet, 2006; Hurtado, 2005; Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007). As is pertains to historic institutional contexts, existing within these spaces and places are students who are affected by how institutions are contextualized, the following section highlights the impact of context on African American students.

**Defining Blackness within the academy and home**

The beginning of framing the presence of Blackness within education can be loosely traced to Du Bois' (1935) argument about the need for segregated schools in effort to protect African American students from cultural traumas experienced when interacting with Whites. He offered the following:

> It is saying in plain English that a separate Negro school, where children are treated like human beings, trained by teachers of their own race, who know what it means to be black in the year of salvation 1935, is infinitely better than making our boys and girls doormats to be spit and trampled upon and lied to by ignorant social climbers, whose sole claim to superiority is the ability to kick "niggers" when they are down. I say, too, that certain studies and discipline necessary to Negroes can seldom be found in white schools. (p. 143)

This sentiment addressed the need for African American students to be educated in schools where their cultural norms, values and behaviors are congruent with those who operate institutions like K-12 or higher education. In making this assertion, Du Bois (1903) built on his previous "double consciousness" framing of Blackness, which is a direct result of being under the normative gaze of Whiteness. To this perspective, Du Bois offers a definition of "double consciousness":

> ...the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in the American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self

> through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, 1903, p. 9)

Du Bois' framing of "double consciousness" was gender inclusive and situated within an American context; however, other Blacks like Fanon (1952), while in France, arrived at similar conclusions about being Black amongst Whites:

> The Black man possesses two dimensions: one with his fellow Blacks, the other with the Whites. A black man behaves differently with a white man than he does with another black man. There is no doubt whatsoever that this fissiparousness is a direct consequence of the colonial undertaking," (p. 1).

In my estimation, not only are the aforementioned Black cultural awarenesses certainly true for myself, but also other African American males within academe have had similar revelations (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Strayhorn, 2007). Despite Du Bois' framing of "double consciousness" nearly 110 years ago, based on subsequent research concerning how African American students experience being Black while attending Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) of higher learning (Fleming, 1984; Harper, 1975; Hurtado, et al., 1998; Kimbrough, 1995; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Patton, Flowers, & Bridges, 2011; Person & Christensen, 1996), it is clear that the intersection of race and education is still an issue.

How African American students experience being Black while attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Historically White Institutions (HWIs) and Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) has been researched by a variety of scholars (Fleming, 1984; Hurtado, et al., 1998; Lyons, 1973; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007). The ways African American students experience being Black while attending college has been the focus of several studies, specifically focused

on how the notion of Blackness impacts African American students' perceptions of themselves. Steele's (1997) study revealed that stereotype threat is experienced by African American students who perceive being Black in deficit terms. This perspective led to underperforming on tests, but only after being told African Americans frequently tested below average. This illustrates how being a Black student could affect persistence if African American intellectual performance is made an issue by faculty (Sleeter, 1993; Smith, 2000).

Komives, et al., (2005), when exploring the leadership identity development of 13 college students, found that students of color who participated in the study "identified race as a critical factor" (p. 599). Their races not only framed their personal growth and self-awareness as student leaders of color in terms of being assets, but also allowed them to see their cultural diversity as beneficial to their organizations. For the two African American male participants in the Komives, et al. (2005) study, being Black student leaders often presented opportunities for them to positively portray African American males, which served as a point of pride as they contradicted negative stereotypes often associated with African American males, such as being uninterested in acquiring a college education (Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007).

The issue of race influencing the extent to which African American students are involved in on campus organizations is relevant due to the fact that "the kind of student organizations in which the students were involved depended on their ethnic backgrounds" (Lavant & Terrell, 1994, p. 68). This supports the belief that students of color join organizations that are specific to their cultural and racial frame of reference. For African American students, there is added motivation to become involved in multicultural

organizations by the opportunity to serve their disenfranchised communities. In part, this desire to give back to their communities stems from African American students' racial socialization by their parents to see themselves as part of a Black collective community that requires their service (Peters, 1985). Peters (1985) defines racial socialization as "tasks Black parents share with all parents-providing for and raising children…but include the responsibility of raising physically and emotionally healthy children who are Black in a society in which being Black has negative connotations" (p. 161). The cultural transmission of Black values and beliefs serves as not only a source of prideful information concerning what it means to be Black, but also acts as "a buffer against societal antagonism toward people of color and seeks to develop self- and community respect" (Stevenson, 1994, p. 191). This said, African American students who have been positively racially socialized by their parents come to campuses with a positive outlook of themselves and their communities because "racial socialization messages are lifelong memories that make up 'Who I am' stories. They form the foundation of African American children's identities" (Stevenson, 1994, p. 193).

Bowman and Howard (1985) found connections between parental racial socialization, (e. g., communicating positive messages about being African American), levels of self-efficacy and academic performance for African American students. Their results implied that those who were racially socialized concerning "racial barriers" and who had higher awareness of interracial protocols attained higher grades. The relevance of this research lies in understanding the connections between positive racial socialization, academic performance, cultural adjustment, self-efficacy and upward mobility for African American students.

In describing the influence of African American college students' Black identity development and value of education, Herndon and Hirt (2004) argued that African American "families provide the background for explaining meaning in life and the world. Another influence of family relates to social context. Parents provide students with a social environment that influences the way students view education" (p. 491). The Herndon and Hirt (2004) study used a mixed methodology to explore the connection between 20 academically successful African American college-going seniors and the role of their families in their lives and success. Study results indicated that African American students' families primarily consist of fictive kin (neighbors, church members and friends) who are responsible for the establishment of "realistic" collegiate expectations that drive student pursuits and accountability, as well as how they see themselves in terms of being Black.

The study conducted by Kiah (1992) explored African American college student persistence and achievement and found that nearly half the participants perceived their mothers as "most influential" in the development of their attitudes toward education and racial identity. One way African American families influence how their children view education is through building scholarly self-esteem through validating intellectual capabilities and instilling a sense of entitlement to being inherently deserving of a higher education. Bolstering this premise is research conducted by Clark (1983) who, when conducting studies with "high-achieving" African American high school seniors from working-class families, found that students perceived parents as supportive and nurturing of academic pursuits. Dressler (1987) found that members of Black households are more likely to seek and receive informal social and emotional support from family members.

Additionally, these perceptions are formed partly due to the fact that "Black parents generally are involved in the lives of their children well into adulthood" (Herndon & Hirt, 2004, p. 494), even during their graduate study years. Even though African American nuclear families have an enormous influence on identity development, it is the extended family that reinforces individual normative behaviors.

Herndon and Hirt (2004) speculated, "Black families are characterized by valuing extended kin relationships" (p. 493) which reinforce the value of being Black. Consequently, African American student contact with family is rather involved and according to Herndon and Hirt (2004),

> Grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and cousins may reside in the same household with the nuclear family. Family kinship among Blacks may also be described as fictive. These kinds of kinship bonds are unrelated by blood; however, they are viewed as equally significant as blood relationships. Fictive kinship networks may include neighbors, church members, and friends. (pp. 493-494)

This assertion speaks to the communal nature of the African American family which at times is bound by resiliency in the form of ability to endure, survive, and develop buoyancy in the face of crises and adversities (Herndon & Hirt, 2004). The term "resiliency" intentionally relates to the helping nature and tradition present within nuclear and extended kin relationships (McAdoo, 1993), which is a primary part of African American identity development prior to college. In attempting to determine the inter-relatedness of ethnic identity achievement to racial identity attitudes among 140 African American college-going students, Johnson and Arbona (2006) found racial identity attitudes were directly related to racism-based stress experiences; however, race-related stress was negatively associated with ethnic identity. This particular study utilized the Black Racial Identity Attitude Scale (BRIS-B) by Parham and Helms (1981) the Multi-

group Ethnic Identity Scale (MEIM) by Phinney (1992) and the Index of Race-Related Stress, Brief version (IRRS-B) by Utsey (1999) to consider how being Black while attending predominantly White institutions is experienced.

Many scholars have argued that the college context, coupled with campus climate, affects both the quality of the experience and the persistence of students of color (Baird, 1988; Cuyjet, 2006; Hurtado, 1992; Palmer & Gasman, 2006) through their interactions with the dominant White culture on predominantly White campuses (Tierney, 1992). According to Brown (2000):

> A dominant culture presents difficulties to newcomers or members of underrepresented groups when trying to understand and appreciate the nuances of behavior. At worst, culture can be an alienating, ethnocentric force that goads members of a group, sometimes out of fear and sometimes out of ignorance, to reinforce their own beliefs. (p. 163)

Trice and Beyer (1984) postulated these dominant cultural nuances, which are found throughout the institution, encompass a variety of concepts (e.g., rites, myths, legends) that exist in the form of university artifacts, values, and basic assumptions and beliefs (Schein, 1985). These concepts are at the core of institutions of higher education, predominantly White or otherwise. In fact, institutional collegiate culture, which is defined by Hurtado (1992) as deeply rooted in contextual site history, provides unique meaning to those who attend because of their connectedness to the university (Astin, 1977; Fleming, 1984; Tinto, 1993). This culture binds students, administrators, faculty and staff to a specific context by dictating "core values which are reflected in the common understandings, assumptions or preferences regarding how people are expected to behave" (Chesler & Crowfoot, 2000, p. 444).

Behaviors seen as normalized at HBCUs may be viewed as inappropriate, deviant or abnormal at historically White institutions. To illustrate, consider the outward display of African American pride exhibited by Black Greek Letter Organization (BGLO) members when participating in competitive step shows, which display modernized forms of rhythmic African dance as a form of honoring African ancestors. According to Chesler and Crowfoot (2000):

> Generally, the ruling values and modes of operation in the university are those of white, Western and Eurocentric civilization. They are not necessarily seen as such; people who are not aware of the existence and shape of white culture may see these as universal moral principles or behavioral norms. (p. 444)

This universal dynamic is filtered throughout the university, within student affairs, housing, admissions and even the classroom. For African American students who have experienced a variety of adverse psychological, emotional and physiological responses to what they perceive as cultural incongruence manifesting in hostile campus climates, these perceptions negatively impact persistence (Steele, 1997; Hurtado, 2000).

Students' perceptions of hostility have been linked to racial microaggressions, which can culminate in racial battle fatigue symptoms that are detrimental to students of color; specifically African Americans (Smith, 2008; Smith, Yosso & Solorzano; 2006). According to Smith (2008), "As a result of chronic racial microaggressions, many people of color perceive the campus environment as extremely stressful, exhausting, and diminishing to their sense of control, comfort, and meaning while eliciting feelings of loss, ambiguity, strain, frustration, and injustice" (p. 616). The cultural relevance of racial microaggressions, as they pertain to African Americans, lies in how they are defined historically.

Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez and Willis (1978) defined racial microaggressions

as “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’ of blacks by offenders” (p. 66) that serve as “stunning, automatic acts of disregard that stem from unconscious attitudes of white superiority and constitute a verification of black inferiority” (Davis, 1989, p. 1576). Although these definitions lay the foundation for understanding the historic Black/White microaggressions binary context, recent literature extends the definition to include “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue, et al., 2007, p. 273). Although African Americans are not the only minoritized group that experiences racial microagressions, racial battle fatigue, hostile campus climates, campus racism or a sense of not fitting in at predominantly White institutional campuses (Bonillia-Silva & Forman, 2000; Swim et al., 2003; Tierney, 1992; Yancey, 2003), it is their collective unique exclusionary experience with preparatory education (e.g., *Brown v. Board* [1954]) and institutions of higher education (e.g., *Adams v. Richardson* [1973]) that frames how being Black historically shapes African American student leader efficacy experiences in this study.

The aforementioned literature speaks to how African American students experience being Black within a variety of college contexts, and illuminates how these students view themselves as Black and ultimately how interacting within racially hostile environments impacts their stress and persistence.

**African American student involvement in college**

In an effort to elucidate the impact of institutional context on college student involvement researchers have examined African American student experiences at both PWIs and HBCUs (Allen, 1987; Cheatham, Slaney, & Coleman, 1990; DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Watson & Kuh, 1996). In most instances, research concluded that where African American student cultural norms, knowledge and values were affirmed, African American students were more academically and socially adjusted, which positively impacted their success and ultimately played a role in the facilitation of their on-campus involvement and degree attainment.

Harper, Carini, Bridges and Hayek (2004) indicated that HBCUs, "in spite of their poorer financial resources, offer better learning environments and support outlets for African American undergraduates, thus more positively affecting African American student outcomes" (p. 271) including academic engagement. Bolstering this perspective is the notion that "students who are actively involved in both academic and out-of-class activities gain more from college than those who are not so involved" (Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, Andreas, Lyons, Strange, Krehbie, & MacKay, 1991, p. xi). Defining student involvement as a function of students' persistence and retention, Astin (1975) noted "it is easier to become involved when one can identify with the college environment" (p. 524). In part, for students to identify with an institutional environment, they need to adjust to the campus climate (Hurtado, et al., 1998; Rankin & Reason, 2005) and develop the pluralistic skills necessary for peer interactions and association (Engberg & Hurtado, 2011). These interactions are crucial to African American students' cultural, academic and social grounding, especially in HBCU environments where they are supported,

nurtured and held accountable for their campus engagement (Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

Astin (1984) posited that "a highly involved student is one who, for example, devotes considerable energy to studying, spends much time on campus, participates actively in student organizations, and interacts frequently with faculty members and other students" (p. 518). Although this framework situates involvement in a variety of ways, other scholars have positioned involvement specific to a student's role within an organization to include positional and nonpositional leadership capacities (Kezar & Moriarty, 2000; Moriarty & Kezar, 2000). Along racial and gendered lines, Kezar and Moriarty (2000), who sampled 9,731 students at 352 institutions, including HBCUs, found that a student's involvement influences their development, which is based on a student's background. Specifically, they found that being involved in elected positional roles was the strongest predictor of leadership ability for White men, and statistically significant for African American women. In contrast, nonpositional extracurricular leadership experiences were significant predictors of leadership ability for African American men and White women (Kezar & Moriarty; Moriarty & Kezar).

For students attending HBCUs, membership in fraternal and sorority organizations, participating in community service projects, interacting with faculty and administrators, providing academic and social outlets for peers, playing intramural sports, participating in peer mentoring and offering emotional outreach are all ways of engaging the campus as positioned by Astin (1984) and Tinto (1993). In fact, although these types of involvement differ based on institutional context and individual, we do know that African American students who attend HBCUs participate in a variety of ways including encouraging peer academic successes, familial inclusion on campus, enacting Black

political agendas and fostering a co-operative rather than a competitive peer culture (DeSousa & Kuh, 1996; Fleming, 1984; Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Palmer, Davis & Maramba, 2011; Perna, et al., 2009). These types of student engagement anchor the lived experiences of African American students at HBCUs as different from those of African Americans attending PWIs due to an absence of the prevalence of racial oppressive issues like microaggressions, direct racism and feelings of isolation (Arminio, et. al, 2000; Hurtado, et al., 1998; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). In part, the breadth of students' involvement is influenced by their social capital, which facilitates with whom they interact, and determines the depth of their social networks (Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

In examining the role social capital has in facilitating the academic success of 11 African American males attending an HBCU, Palmer and Gasman (2008) found that faculty and administrative encouragement to become involved in various facets of campus, including student organizations, served as a catalyst for developing faculty relationships, reciprocating peer encouragement and contributing to a supportive campus community. They further found that "these relationships provided a rich source of social capital for the African American males at this HBCU that many minority students at HWIs may not experience" (p. 65). Consequently, the relevance of racial campus climate should not be lost as shown in research that situates HBCUs' institutional environments as more conducive to facilitating positive African American student engagement than PWIs (Allen, 1987; Bonner II, 2001; Fleming, 1984; Flowers 2002; Patton, Flowers & Bridges, 2011).

The connection between student involvement, departure and persistence, as

positioned by Tinto (1975, 1993) and Astin (1984, 1999), hinges on a student's ability to engage with the college environment in a variety of ways, including activity in student organizations. To this point, researchers such as Tierney (1992) and Terenzini and Reason (2005), when critiquing Tinto, took into account how the presence of dominant White normative values, beliefs, attitudes, and expectations influenced the environment, especially on predominantly White campuses. These environmental influences impact the extent to which students of color perceive the campus as a safe place where they can "fit in" and ultimately persist based on lived experiences that inform whether they feel valued or marginalized (Cabrera, Nora, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Hagedorn, 1999; Feagin, 1992; Harper & Hurtado, 2007). These types of experiences also influence how students of color interact socially within the PWI environment. Braxton and Lee (2005), when extending Tinto's interactionalist theory (1993), found a connection between social interaction, institutional commitment, and a student's persistence. In essence, if students of color feel like PWI campus environments are welcoming, it is easier for them to become involved on campus, interact socially, commit to the institution and ultimately persist.

What Black student leadership looks like

The way most African American students are formally engaged in leadership involvement, whether attending HBCUs or PWIs, is through participation in student organizations (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Patton, Flowers and Bridges, 2011; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). In fact, as early as the beginning of the 20$^{th}$ century African American undergraduates created historically Black student organizations, (i.e., Alpha Phi Alpha

Fraternity, Inc.) on Historically White Institutional (HWI) campuses for a variety of purposes including social fulfillment. These organizations were designed to foster solidarity amongst the Negro college-bound community by providing positive racial identity development and racial pride on newly desegregated campuses where these students were challenged in a variety of ways (DuBois, 1973). Prior to 1960, African American students were rarely involved on HWI campuses with the exception of participating in ethnic, same-race peer organizations like fraternities or sororities (Gallagher, 1971), which served as entry points to African American student involvement at HWIs. In part, these organizations were created due to "Black student alienation at predominantly White colleges and universities, coupled with a growing racial consciousness among Blacks nationwide due to the spread of the Black Power movement" (Williamson, 1999, p. 95), which influenced the rise of Black student unions with the namesakes of Black Students' Association, African American Students' Society, and United Afro-American Students.

Although there are numerous examples of how Black student unions played key roles in the development of African American student leaders during the "protest decade" (Peniel, 2003), on campuses like Columbia (PWI) and Howard University (HBCU), what is irrefutable is the level of political activism enacted. In the 1960s, according to Peniel (2003), "African independence movements dominated the black radical intelligentsia and emboldened and inspired African American political activists" (p. 184), which included African American college students. To illustrate, on April 9, 1968, Black students at the University of Michigan took over the administration building by chaining the doors and demanding to meet with President Fleming; doing so closed the campus for 18 days, the

longest such student led standoff in the history of academe (Gurin, Lehman, & Lewis, 2004). The purpose of their protest was to increase the number of African American students and professors to 10%, which led to the development of a Martin Luther King, Jr. Scholarship and Professorship.

This movement of activism culminated with the creation of the Black Action Movement (BAM), which consisted of various multicultural student led organizations that held a series of student protest in 1970, 1975, and 1987. These protest were designed to hold the University of Michigan accountable to promised, proactive policies created to better the racial campus climate, like creating a Black Studies program, Black student center and establish supportive services for "minority" students (Bryant, 2007). Collective student efforts like the aforementioned, when applied within academe, served as organized outlets of formal protest and activism for African American students who sought equality and equity within higher education.

In contrast, the Afro-American Association, which was founded by students at the University of California (UC) at Berkeley in response to the alienation and racism experienced on campus, had an activist agenda that extended beyond a particular campus and directly into the Black community at large (Lacy, 1971). Built off of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) model, the organization focused on employing peaceful modes of activism like street-speaking, rallies, and study sessions, in order to reach hundreds of Bay Area young people (Peniel, 2003). Acting as a voice for African Americans within the community, the Afro-American Association provided a particular benefit for Black students by offering "an ideological and practical platform for a black nationalist-based critique of American society and international political and

economic affairs" (Peniel, 2003, p. 187). Additionally, the Afro-American Association, by enacting an activist campaign of curricula advocacy, concerning the implication of African American history and culture on college campuses, was a foundational advocate of the modern Black Studies Movement on the West Coast (Lacy, 1971). These two student-directed organizations empowered African American leaders to purposefully pursue the elimination of inequity on their campuses and within their communities, which provided numerous opportunities for college involvement. In essence, utilizing student organizations allowed for social justice activism to be developed and persist throughout predominantly White institutions' (PWIs) campuses across the nation based on the direct influence of how African American students experienced racial campus climates.

Indeed, organizations like the abovementioned served as outlets for student involvement and campus engagement and vehicles for the expression of Black political agendas and cultural identity (Fleming, 1984), but not without cost. In examining how Black students adjusted to attending college on predominantly White institutional campuses, Lyons (1973) found that "most of the leaders appeared to be in academic difficulty because of the tremendous amount of time required of them in the leadership role" (p. 464), which was spent mostly utilizing their organizations to help African American students negotiate the campus political landscape. Likewise, Guiffrida (2004) found that involvement in Black student organizations was academically detrimental to African American students who focused on hierarchical leadership, community service and sought to change the college institution for the benefit of African American students, over studying and earning good grades. However, students who valued the notion of communal leadership, which was based on equal distribution of work despite elected

titles, and who saw academic achievement as more important than community service and institutional change fared better academically. Despite this, African American student organizations have served as positive points of involvement for African American students attending historically White institutions.

To illustrate, Flowers (2004), through administering the *College Student Experiences Questionnaire* to a sample of 7,923 African American students from 192 PWI and HBCU postsecondary institutions, between 1990 and 2000, found that in-class and out-of-class experiences positively impacted the development of African American participants. Specifically, African American educational outcomes were positively influenced by students' desire to seek information about becoming involved in student organizations including clubs and government. Similarly, Littleton (2002) who interviewed 24 African American students about factors contributing to their persistence, also found that students' involvement experiences played a role in ensuring their progress toward graduation as opposed to those who did not see their involvement as impactful. Although each of these studies found that interest or participation in student organizations had a positive affect on African American student persistence, neither focused on historically Black student organizations.

Guiffrida (2003) interviewed 88 African American students attending a predominantly White institution and found that historically Black student organizations served to facilitate cultural connections and social integration into the university despite having different missions tied to a variety of functions including religious, Black Greek, academic honors, political affiliation or student government. Specifically, membership in these organizations allowed African American students to establish out-of-class faculty

connections, participate in service to African American communities, and experience a sense of ease by interacting with African American peers who provided a similar cultural likeness. Additionally, these organizations facilitated a connection for African American students who had limited exposure to African American culture due to growing up in predominantly White areas of the country. As mentioned earlier, the vital role of Black Greek organizations, in aiding African American student persistence, must not be understated (Patton & Bonner, 2001).

Schuh, Triponey, Heim, and Nishimura (1992) explored the role of student involvement in historically Black organizations, specifically, the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC), which is the governing body for historically Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs). A significant finding was that African American males' understanding of leadership development was enhanced by professional experience of carrying out leadership roles in NPHC while providing participants opportunities to be mentored by other leaders. Kimbrough (1995), who examined the leadership experiences of 61 African American students on a predominantly White institutional campus, utilized a survey instrument to look at those students who were members of the Black Greek council, the Black student association, and the gospel choir. Of those participating, 27 were members of BGLOs, while the remaining 34 were not Greek-affiliated. Concerning self-assessment of leadership, 92% of BGLO members considered themselves leaders, as compared to 94.2% of non-BGLO members. Interestingly, 74% of BGLO members actively participated in two or more campus or community groups while holding office in at least one student organization. A key finding was that, regardless of BGLO membership or affiliation, the majority of participants perceived Black-dominated

organizations as providing more leadership opportunities than predominantly White organizations and saw the former as a more valuable source of leadership experience.

In a similar study, which focused on the development of leadership skills as experienced by 387 African American students from 12 institutions (7 PWIs and 5 HBCUs), 47% of whom were members in Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLOs), Kimbrough and Hutcheson (1998) found 82% of non-Greeks and 89.6% of Black Greeks perceived themselves as leaders. In particular, those students who were members of BGLOs were involved in organizations as elected leaders more frequently than those who were non-Greek. The significant findings indicated that not only were BGLO members more involved in campus activities and organizations than non-Greeks, but they also held multiple leadership positions. Additionally, BGLO members were involved in other organizations and those who joined BGLOs increased their overall campus involvement. Furthermore, they found that "Greeks at HBCUs almost always scored significantly higher on measures of student involvement, perceptions of their leadership ability, and leadership skill development than did their non-Greek counterparts at these predominantly Black institutions" (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998, p. 103).

Similarly, Patton, Flowers and Bridges (2011), who utilized the National Survey of Student Engagement (2003) sample that included 9,539 African American students; (2,996 of whom attended HBCUs and 6,543 attended PWIs), found that Greek affiliation enhances African American student engagement academically and socially through interactions with faculty members and peers whether attending HBCUs or PWIs. Furthermore, Black Greek affiliates attending HBCUs were more engaged than their counterparts at PWIs due to nurturing campus climates that centered their cultural

perspectives and actively ensured that educational environments were safe. Across these two studies (Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Patton, Flowers and Bridges; 2011) it is clear that participating in Black Greek Letter Organizations (BGLO) is beneficial to the academic, social and leadership development of students in culturally validating spaces. Moreover, because BGLO leaders often advocated on behalf of peers, they interacted with faculty more frequently than non-BGLO members, which allowed for additional faculty mentoring opportunities. The findings of the aforementioned two articles on BLGO student involvement support previous research by Astin (1993) stating that Greek-letter organization membership positively affects student involvement.

Finally, Dugan, Komives and Segar (2008), employed the Socially Responsible Leadership Scale (SRLS) to determine the capacity of students to develop socially responsible leadership (Tyree, 1998). They sampled 50,378 students who attended 52 institutions, 2 of which were HBCUs, and found that African American students reported significantly higher mean scores on consciousness of self, controversy with civility, citizenship, and change. The significance of African American student leadership in the aforementioned categories is congruent with African American orientations of value that are collectively and culturally-centered (Arminio, et al., 2000; Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Importantly, in the Dugan, et al. (2008) study leadership was defined as a process that creates social change. Therefore, African American students' higher mean scores support previous research that illustrates their desire to facilitate social change for their communities (Arminio et al., 2000; Harper & Quaye, 2007). The aforementioned studies speak to student leaders' experiences at HBCU and PWI institutional environments by providing a glimpse into the collective rationale for

becoming leaders. Furthermore, when engaging campuses in leadership capacities, participants benefitted academically, socially and culturally in each study, which confirms the value of involvement as important to the survival of African American students attending PWIs.

According to Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) "despite incidents of racial and cultural insensitivity at many predominantly White institutions, Black students are surviving socially and are involved within multicultural and traditional campus organizations" (p. 36). Examining the role ethnic student organizations play in facilitating the adjustment of 12 Asian and 12 African American students (16 women and 8 men) to a predominantly White institution, Museus (2008) found that ethnic student organizations "facilitated the cultural adjustment and membership of minority student participants by serving as sources of cultural familiarity, vehicles for cultural expression and advocacy, and venues for cultural validation" (p. 576). Specifically, ethnic student organizations provided places where participants could share common cultural knowledge and compare struggles, which allowed for a closer connectedness amongst them. Along gender lines, Harper and Quaye (2007) interviewed 32 high-achieving African American males and found that ethnic organizations served as catalysts for the Black identity development of participants by allowing for the validation of the expression of their Blackness. Ethnic student organizations also presented opportunities for these African American males to participate in leadership, which fostered their engagement in both predominantly Black and majority White student organizations. Participants learned the value of cross-cultural communication skills, enabling them to learn from racially different peers, which enhanced their ability to advocate for other marginalized students.

In assessing ethnic minority student leadership and involvement in student governance at 4 predominantly White institutions, Lavant and Terrell (1994) used survey questionnaires to examine the engagement of 250 students of color on their campuses. They determined that 51 (39%) of African American students were not involved in campus student organizations, 48 (37%) were somewhat involved and 32 (24%) were very involved. African American students were the least involved ethnic group. In comparison, 33% of Hispanics and 43% of Asian Americans were involved in campus student organizations, while only 12% of Hispanics and 5% of Asian American students were not involved. In addition to being the least involved in student organizations, African American students were the most dissatisfied with faculty and staff. In fact, 38% of African American students felt that the faculty and staff were insensitive to minority issues, which was not only more than all of the students of color combined, but it also influenced their perception of institutional support.

Person and Christensen (1996) found that multicultural student organizations provided a sense of mattering and belonging for African American students who felt isolated and alienated. Similarly, Sutton and Kimbrough (2001) found that minority student organizations served as the primary venue for involvement among Black students. More importantly, "the unique mission and commitment to enhance the academic and social environment for Black students remains a pivotal reason why these students remain involved within these organizations" (p. 37). Specifically, African American students value membership in multicultural organizations because they see them as providing opportunities to further develop leadership abilities that can be used to elevate the Black community. Additionally, based on institutional type, students utilized varying

organizational outlets for involvement. Students attending predominantly White institutions were more involved in Black student groups, while those attending predominantly Black institutions were more likely to be involved in student government and as orientation leaders.

Studies like these align with Astin's (1984) student involvement theory, even if the identification is within ethnic, same-race, or multicultural organizations. In part, "identifying" is contingent upon the degree to which African American students feel that they "fit in" or align with institutional values, beliefs and norms, which are contextually bound (Tinto, 1993). Based on the institutional context, racial cultural climate and organization type, African American students' experiences vary from feeling a sense of racial belongingness, using organizational membership as a source of cultural adjustment and finding racial uplift advocacy of racial/ethnic minority student interests to identifying feelings of social isolation, overcoming persistent stereotypes and needing to prove intellectual ability as justification for their presence on campus (Gibbs 1988; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Lett & Wright, 2003; Museus, 2008; Palmer & Gasman; 2008; Pound 1987; Strayhorn, 2007).

Arminio, et al. (2000) interviewed 136 students of color, 34 of whom were African American (22 males, 12 females) to determine how students of color experience leadership in same race, multiracial and predominantly White organizations. They found that students of color experienced distinct differences pertaining to group loyalty, a lack of campus staff and faculty role models, and a disdain for the term "leader," all of which were based on the racial make-up and type of organization. Specifically, African American students saw being leaders as burdensome due to "lofty expectations" (p. 501).

This, coupled with feelings of having to assimilate to be involved in predominantly White organizations, proved problematic. Although previous research posited that students' decisions to join organizations are influenced by perceptions of racial belonging (Helms, 1993; Tatum, 1997), perhaps a primary reason African American students participate is that organizational values are congruent with their personal beliefs. Finally, in the Arminio, et al. study, African American students cited the primary reason for becoming leaders in organizations was the need to fulfill parental expectations.

Various researchers (Fleming, 1984; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus, 2008) have investigated African American leaders' experiences in student organizations at HBCUs and HWIs. However, many of these studies neglected to disaggregate the experiences of African Americans by leadership efficacy, development and perceptions. As such, a lack of literature exists that documents the leadership experiences of African Americans at HWIs, particularly those who are leaders in historically Black and predominantly White student organizations. This study aims to mitigate the scarcity of knowledge about African American student leadership experiences and leader efficacy across each organizational context in effort to determine how leadership theories apply to this student demographic.

**Leadership theories**

In reviewing the evolution of leadership theory it is important to note the numerous definitions of leadership, as well as the complexity involved in arriving at a universal leadership definition that is applicable across all collegiate environments. African American students' definitions of leadership not only reflect a preference to lead

through service activities within the local community as opposed to elected positions, these students also see themselves as leaders whether or not they hold elected positions in organizations (McKenzie, 1990; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001). Contrarily, Arminio, et al. (2000) found that some African American students resented the term "leader" because they saw the term as connected to the "oppressor's system" or the "enemy" (p. 500). In fact, African American students saw themselves as involved rather than leading, reflecting a desire to be communal and deferring attention away from themselves in an effort to make their efforts about helping the group, not themselves. This type of selfless leadership is similar to Greenleaf's (1977) servant way of leading in that leaders lead to fulfill the needs of followers, not themselves. Considering the aforementioned ways that leadership is enacted by students of color, it is important to differentiate the numerous definitions of leadership in the literature.

To understand how leadership is defined, I first searched for specific literature that offered comprehensive examinations of leadership directly tied to African American ways of knowing, being and doing. As it pertains to modes of leadership amongst the members of African American communities, two foundational books, Walters and Smith's (1999) *African American Leadership* and Marable's (1998) *Black Leadership*, explored cultural ways of leading within political contexts that provided an understanding of Black American perspectives concerning the impact of American inequalities on the development of African American societal liberties, as well as how to pursue equality. Both books suggest that systemic infrastructures need to be dismantled and re-erected for the purpose granting African Americans opportunities historically not afforded, and each author strongly suggested that those who take the call to leadership do so with a

communal agenda as their primary objective.

Marable (1998) provided a comparison of charismatic political African American leadership styles that encompass the likes of Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, A. Philip Randolph, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr. and Jesse Jackson. In the introduction Marable pondered the evolution of Black leadership by stating, "But it may be the measurement of our ability to achieve a full redefinition of America's democratic project if over time black Americans are able to move away from the charismatic, authoritarian leadership style and paternalistic organizations toward the goal of 'group-centered leaders' and grassroots empowerment" (p. xvii). Throughout *Black Leadership* the issues therein, economic mobility, political power, wage differentials and class conflict are framed within a racial binary, which compares the status of African Americans to that of Whites. The charge is ultimately to develop future generations of Black leaders equipped with the leadership abilities needed to liberate African Americans from the structural and individual impediments that historically and currently limit their collective social mobility.

Outlining the ways in which Black leaders can lead African Americans toward equality, on a variety of social and systemic fronts, the following centers race as prime:

> There is no question that race remains a critically important factor in determining the life chances—employment, income mobility, housing, health care, education—of all African Americans, even a generation after the Civil Rights Movement. But African Americans as a group have always understood that race does not and cannot explain everything. (Marable, 1998, p. 188)

This assertion allows for the consideration of peripheral issues like access to a quality education, employment and membership within unionized organizations, acquiring affordable housing and gender equity as experienced by African Americans. Ultimately,

Marable (1998) positioned African American leaders as responsible for redirecting and changing the plight of Blacks and urged those who consider themselves Black leaders to utilize a systemic approach focused on achieving the collective needs of African Americans.

Walters and Smith (1999) offered a critique of the then bereft research about Black leadership and encouraged scholars to be more analytical in developing a research agenda that delves deeply into how African Americans lead. Walters and Smith discussed the following main areas: 1) "Whites have more to do with the leadership of blacks than black leadership does" (p. 102), which spoke to the lack of empowerment offered systemically; 2) "Racism [still] constitutes the major impediment to the forward progress of African Americans in the United States" (p. 97), which positions racism as endemic; 3) African American leadership operates in "an outmoded civil rights-social welfare ideology", which inadequately prepares Blacks to meet evolving contemporary challenges (p. 79); and 4) Black leaders are guided by four leadership modes—behavior-consensus, community, external, and auto-selected—based on their immediate access to resources (p. 217). This assessment rests on the following critical premise:

> Since the 1960s, the social science community in general and political scientists in particular have largely abandoned the *systematic* [emphasis in original] study of African American leadership .... [What exists] is a limited body of research that is adhoc, atheoretical, methodologically diffuse, and hence noncumulative—in other words, a confused series of unrelated and disjointed articles and books instead of a cumulative body of knowledge. (Walters & Smith, 1999, p. 85)

Walters and Smith's book is a call to action on the part of African American scholars within academe who have yet to elucidate the variety of ways Black communal leaders enact leadership, to discuss the intersections of leading and the social impediments that often prevent proactive change within African American communities.

Although these books are not empirical, each provides a valuable perspective about African American leadership and how it is politicized to discuss Black communal agendas. Albeit not a part of the larger literature concerning leadership theories, these books also contribute to framing Black leadership as somewhat emancipatory due to situating leadership examples within the context of attempting to achieve racial equity for African Americans.

Rost (1991) divided leadership theories into industrial and postindustrial categories. Industrial leadership theories focus on a variety of factors including traits, personality, behaviors, situations, skill sets, contingencies and influential ways of leading that are primarily leader-centered (Fielder, 1964, 1967; Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; Katz, 1955; Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1948, 1974). Postindustrial leadership theories focus on a variety of approaches including transformative, transformational, servitude and authentic ways of leading that are primarily reciprocal and shared between leaders and organizational members to include "followers" (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1990; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1970, 1977). Although these industrial/postindustrial theories focus on organizational environments that are corporate, various leadership aspects are applicable within a variety of contexts, specifically that of Burns' (1978) transformational and Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership theories.

According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership is a process where the motivation and morality of leaders and followers is elevated to higher levels due to their direct interactions. He posited that transformational leadership achieves moral dimensions as a result of elevating followers' and leaders' ethical aspirations through shared influential relationships. Specifically, "transforming leadership ultimately

becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both" (Burns, 1978, p. 20). Therefore, transformational leadership develops due to a leader's ability to maintain and effectuate relationships with followers to achieve organizational purposes. To illustrate, the civil rights college organization, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was created in 1960 at Shaw University to help African American citizens gain equal rights. One goal of the organization's leader, Stokley Carmichael, was to transform the livelihood of African Americans in the Southern states by way of the ballot box through organizing voter registration drives. As the leader, he utilized social activism as a form of transformational leadership to motivate organization members to respond to a higher moral calling, which was based on ethical considerations that achieved the purpose of inspiring people to fight for equality. The ability to achieve these organizational purposes, as determined by leaders and followers, is ultimately at the center of member relationships, but is based on follower motivation (Burns, 1978).

Bass (1985), who refined Burns' (1978) theory by focusing on follower needs, argued that transformational leadership motivates followers to exceed expectations. This conceptualization of transformational leadership is based on raising awareness about the importance of idealized goals, placing organizational above self-interest and motivating followers to address higher-level needs. Bass and Avolio (1994) provided a more comprehensive description of transformational leadership by including it in a Full Range of Leadership (FRL) model, which operates on a continuum to include transformational, transactional and laissez-faire modes of leading. In the FRL model, transformational leadership includes four factors: 1) idealized influence; 2) inspirational motivation; 3)

intellectual stimulation; and 4) individualized consideration. Transactional leadership includes two factors: 1) contingent reward and constructive transactions; and 2) management by exception. Nonleadership has a single factor called laissez-faire.

Within the FRL model, the first transformational leadership factor is *idealized influence*, which represents leaders who are seen as role models by followers who desire to emulate their leadership due to the high standards exhibited while leading. The second factor, *inspirational motivation*, represents leaders who are able to communicate expectations to followers and influence them to believe in the organization's vision. *Intellectual stimulation* is the third factor, which challenges followers to examine their personal beliefs and values as compared to those of the leader and organization. Finally, *individualized consideration* is exhibited by leaders who create supportive climates for followers within the organization. Two additional leadership factors are also offered by the FRL model. The first is *contingent reward*, which represents the exchange process between leaders and followers for specific follower rewards in return for goals achieved. The second is *management by exception*, which is the way in which leaders use constructive criticism and negative reinforcement to motivate followers. Finally, the non-leadership factor of laissez-faire is represented by the absence of leadership where leaders avoid leading.

Bass and Avolio (1994) noted that transformational leadership produces greater effects than transactional leadership by resulting in performances that exceed expectations. Yukl (1999), in critiquing various modes of leadership, found a positive relationship between subordinate satisfaction, motivation and performance, and transformational leadership characteristics. According to Northouse (2010):

> …throughout the process, transformational leaders are effective at working with people. They build trust and foster collaboration with others. Transformational leaders encourage others and celebrate their accomplishments. In the end, transformational leadership results in people feeling better about themselves and their contributions to the greater common good. (p. 186)

Fundamentally, placing this collective desire to achieve organizational purposes at the center of leadership is crucial to a beneficial process that is not only inclusive and empowering, but is also ethical. Though researchers (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Yukl, 1999) have utilized Burns' (1978) theory to examine the effectiveness of transformational leadership in corporate and communal venues, none of these studies have specifically examined how transformational leadership is carried out by historically marginalized groups of college students. Additionally, despite newer studies that have examined leadership within higher education contexts, including the social leadership model of leadership development (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 1996) and the leadership identity development model (Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006). This literature also fails to address how African American students conceptualize leadership within contexts that have been perceived as racially hostile like those found at some historically white institutions.

Greenleaf's (1977) servant leadership, which falls between the industrial and postindustrial paradigms, advanced the notion of leadership as values-based, focusing on creating shared processes that render mutual outcomes (Komives, et al., 2011). By offering a strongly altruistic leader-follower relational template, servant leadership "emphasizes that leaders should be attentive to the concerns of their followers and should empathize with them; they should take care of them and nurture them" (Northouse, 2010, p. 385), which enables leaders to serve. To this point, Greenleaf (1970, 1977) postulated

that leadership positions are often bequeathed upon those who are innately servants because their prime directive is to serve as oppose to lead.

Specifically, Greenleaf (1977) offers the following concerning what constitutes a servant leader:

> It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such, it will be a later choice to serve—after leadership is established. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. (p. 27)

This analysis is important because it differentiates the servant leader from all other types of leadership, especially when it comes to the motivation behind leading. A person must first become a servant before they can become a leader, which enables them to intimately understand and focus on the needs of followers thereby empowering followers to become servant leaders. This ability to empower followers, who may be victims of cultural inequalities, is reflected by servant leaders who are purposefully engrossed in actively attempting to remove societal impediments and injustices (Graham, 1991). In fact, according to Northouse (2010), "in addition to serving, the servant leader has a social responsibility to be concerned with the have-nots and to recognize them as equal stakeholders" (p. 385) within organizations and beyond. In advancing Greenleaf (1977), Spears (1995) identified ten characteristics of servant leadership (listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community), while other scholars have explored the links between servanthood and formal leadership roles within a contemporary context (Bass, 1999; Bowman, 1997; Buchen, 1998; Chappel, 2000; Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998; Pollard, 1997; Russel, 2000; Senge, 1990, 1995; Spears, 1995).

In their examination of servant leadership, Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) presented the philosophical teachings of Jesus Christ as the original template for serving in a leadership capacity by situating the "primary intent" of servant leaders as "not only about 'doing' the acts of service but also 'being' a servant. It logically implies, therefore, that the leader-follower relationship is that of a client-server, not supervisor-subordinate or master-slave relationship" (p. 95). The benefits of employing a client-server paradigm to leadership roles are several, including an overwhelming trust that allows for the creation of an environment for organizational excellence (Lowe, 1998).

Comparatively, Burns' (1978) and Greenleaf's (1977) theoretical leadership perspectives are complementary in terms of how the process of leading is enacted; however, primary differences concern the focus of the leader. Specifically, "While transformational leaders and servant leaders both show concern for their followers, the overriding focus of the servant leader is upon service to their followers" (Russell, Stone & Patterson, 2004, p. 354). In fact, while transformational leaders focus on building follower commitment to organizational objectives by empowering followers (Yukl, 1998), servant leaders focus not on organizational outcomes, tasks and products, but emphasize serving followers by building relationships (Lubin, 2001). Furthermore, servant leaders believe organizational outcomes are achieved only after first enabling the growth, development, and well-being of organizational followers (Russell, Stone & Patterson, 2004), while transformational leaders push to align their personal interests, as well as those of followers, with that of the organization, group or society (Bass, 1990). These distinct differences in theoretical application allow for the contrast to be applied to African American student leaders, who in this study lead in a variety of contextually

different organizations, which influences their understanding of professional, positional and racial identities as leaders. Finally, although organizations vary, I surmise that each context is affected by micro-organizational climate, which is steeped in race, and further influences how African American students lead when interacting with organizational contexts.

**Theoretical framework**

This study is situated within the context of student leadership, yet is bound by race and gendered lenses, which allowed for the utilization of a multiple-tiered theoretical framework. Campus racial climate (Hurtado, et al., 1998), which helps scholars examine the historical, structural, behavioral and perceptual dimensions of the college environment, is the primary theoretical perspective for framing this study. Additionally, research by Logue, Hutchens and Hector (2005), which frames students' positive phenomenological experiences with leadership as affected by those with whom students interact, the degree of activity students exhibit and organizational type are applied to understand the contextual influences on leadership outcomes.

**Campus racial climate**

The concept of campus racial climate, as presented by Hurtado (1992), detailed the various racial/ethnic elements that influence diversity, institutional climate and collegiate environments. In subsequent research Hurtado (1994), although exclusively focused on Latino populations and their sense of belonging, further framed campus racial climates as overarching multidimensional, multicontextual environments that shape the

college experiences of students racially. According to Hurtado (1994), each college campus is contextualized within an overarching multidimensional climate that is based on an institutional legacy of inclusion or exclusion, numerical structural diversity, psychological group perceptions and on-campus intergroup relations. Students who attend college interact with each dimension, which influences their perceptions of campus racial climate and ultimately their persistence. While the historic legacy of colleges' exclusion of student groups, like African Americans, contributes to a prevailing negative institutional climate, it is structural properties like selectivity, size and racial composition (Weidman, 1989) that shape student perceptions of campus racial tensions (Dey, 1991; Hurtado, 1992; Jessor, 1979). The perceptual dimension pertains to students' interpretation of institutional responsiveness concerning diversity and is influenced by Black-White relations on campus (Peterson, et al., 1978). Finally, students' behaviors, relating to inter- and intragroup interactions, influence their perceptions of the institutional climate based on the historic, structural and perceptual dimensions. Further extending the concept of campus racial climate, Hurtado, et al. (1998) offered the following:

> The institutional context contains four dimensions resulting from educational programs and practices. They include an institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion of various racial/ethnic groups, its structural diversity in terms of numerical representation of various racial/ethnic groups, the psychological climate of perceptions and attitudes between and among groups, and the behavioral climate dimension, characterized by intergroup relations on campus. (p. 280)

The Hurtado, et al. (1998) campus racial climate framework, which measures macro-institutional campus racial climate is applied in this study at the micro-organizational level to examine how African American students experience being leaders

in historically Black and predominantly White organizations. In part, the rationale for using the Hurtado, et al. (1998) framework is based on the connection between the diversity of student bodies (structural diversity), diverse peers interactions (behavioral dimension) and student perceptions of institutional environment with outcomes like involvement or campus engagement. Although Milem, et al. (2005) introduced a "fifth dimension" to the Hurtado, et al. (1998) framework that "represents the organizational and structural aspects of colleges and the ways in which benefits for some groups become embedded into these organizational and structural processes" (p. 18), this addition is institutional and does not focus on the micro-organizational aspect of student organizations. Specifically, I examine how each micro-organization's context (i.e., historical and structural dimensions) shapes the perceptual and behavioral dimensions of participants' leadership.

## Institutional dimensions of campus climate

### *Historic dimensional influences*

The historical dimension of Hurtado's (1992) campus racial climate model focuses on the vestiges of exclusion within academe as reflections of overarching sociohistorical policies that reinforce gender and racial segregation, to affect institutional practices and campus climates (Hurtado 1992; Hurtado et al., 1998, 1999). Although there are numerous institutions like Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges that have missions designed to serve African American and indigenous people, historically White institutions (HWIs), like the University of Oklahoma (OU) and Oklahoma State University (OSU), have at one time practiced

exclusion, which prohibited the admission of students of color (Horowitz 1987; Solomon 1985). According to Hurtado, et al. (2008) the influence of historical legacies on institutional campus climate must not be understated. The authors call for a comprehensive exploration of collegiate norms, traditions, policies, practices and mission statements because these elements impact campus climate in both subtle and overt ways.

To enumerate, Johnson-Bailey, et al. (2009) researched the campus climate perceptions of African American graduate students who attended a southern university that practiced segregation during the Civil Rights era. Although desegregation was eventually lifted, symbols of exclusion, like the Confederate flag, were still visible throughout campus. Johnson-Bailey, et al. found that participants perceived faculty as less discriminatory over time, and participants were less likely to be seen as academically inferior with each subsequent student cohort. However, students experienced feeling like they were racial representatives of African American people and faced discrimination when interacting with White students, which at times led to self-segregation on their campus. Although participants' social and academic experiences varied across the 30-year duration of the study, evidence supports a continued, recognizable legacy of the historical vestiges of segregation, which influenced how participants experienced the institutional environment.

The historic dimension of campus racial climate is relevant to my dissertation study because it allows for the analysis of participants' narratives to be viewed through a contextual filter at the micro-organizational level, which is influenced by the mission of each organization. To this point, every historically Black organization in this study was created by African American students with the overarching purpose of serving the social

or academic needs of members, especially in the absence of institutional provisions. Furthermore, because OU and OSU practiced segregation against African Americans, and have yet to achieve attendance percentages above 5% nearly 63 years after integrating, a consideration of the historic ramifications is warranted.

*Structural dimensional influences*

The structural dimension is represented by the various ways diversity is personified by students, faculty, staff, and administrators numerically on college campuses (Hurtado, et al. 1999; Milem, et al. 2005). Foundational studies connected the desire to achieve a critical mass of numbers of African American students on campus and the frequency of campus political and racial protests (Astin & Bayer, 1971; Astin, et al., 1975). Additionally, according to Thompson and Sekaquaptewa (2002) low numbers of underrepresented groups are detrimental to students of color because the greater the campus diversity, the increased likelihood of reduced prejudice (Denson, 2009; Engberg, 2004). This is important because student satisfaction is positively related to the college experience and compositional diversity (Hinrichs, 2011). Furthermore, Thompson and Sekaquaptewa (2002) found students' experiences are more inclusive when there is broad racial representation on college campuses, thereby affecting the extent to which students are tokenized, due to increased opportunities for sociocultural interactions.

When discussing the significance of institutions' racial diversity Thompson and Sekaquaptewa (2002) found that "being the only member of one's race or gender in educational or work settings is more detrimental to the performance of women and racial minorities than Whites and males" (p. 199). This finding is bolstered by Park's (2009)

assertion that students' perceptions of campus racial climate are influenced by their interactions with members of the student body, and faculty members. This claim mirrors the Hurtado, et al. (2011) belief that a lack of diversity heightens students' racial awareness due to prejudice, but also can increase their identity development if campuses are more inclusive. Each of the aforementioned authors suggests there is value in having greater compositional diversity on campuses, as well as a direct benefit to students and faculty of color, which to their points is a primary reason for diversifying institutions of higher education.

The relevance of these studies lies in providing data that speaks to the value of having diversity on campuses, which can be applied at the institutional level, as well as toward predominantly White student organizations. In fact, because race-based organizations have acted as culturally-safe, ethnic enclaves (Yancey, 2003) for students of color on campuses that lacked diversity, considering the affects of diversity across organizational context is appropriate. Moreover, examining how participants in this dissertation study led constituents, while considering their race, is important because it speaks to the influence of racial context as a factor in the leadership development of African American students.

Individual dimensions of campus climate

*Behavioral dimensional influences*

The behavioral dimension of the campus climate is referred to as the context in which students interact with other cultural groups, as well as the frequency of those interactions (Hurtado, 2005; Hurtado, et al., 2008). These types of interactions have been

categorized as formal and informal, which constitute campus-facilitated (e.g., in the classroom), as well as educational activities not formally facilitated by the institution (e.g., chance peer meetings) to include social interactions (Gurin, et al., 2002; Hurtado, 2005). Research concerning informal interactions primarily concerns perceptions of the campus racial climate, effects on educational outcomes, sense of belonging, transiting into college (Denson & Chang 2009; Locks, et al., 2008; Nuñez, 2009a; Singley & Sedlacek, 2009; Smith, 2008; Smith, Yosso & Solorzano, 2006), and students attending hostile collegiate climates (Shammas 2009; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Suarez-Balcazar, et al., 2003).

According to Nuñez (2009b), who conducted a study with Latina/o college students attending 4-year public research institutions, students have a greater sense of belonging if they possess knowledge of campus diversity issues, and participate in social and academic engagement. Locks, et al. (2008) found students' sense of belonging in institutional environments is associated with positive and diverse peer interactions. Additionally, student perceptions of campus climates are influenced by faculty interactions, which not only impact students' behaviors pertaining to their associations with diversity, but also influence academic outcomes (Cole, 2007; Cress, 2008). Specifically, Cress (2008) found students were less likely to report experiencing prejudice if they had positive interactions and relationships with faculty, while Cole (2007) determined that diverse peer interactions were positively associated with student involvement and interactions with faculty. In summation, students who experience positive informal and formal interactions with peers and faculty on college campuses are more likely to continue doing so, which fosters greater opportunities for interactions with

those in their institutional environments and positively influences perceptions of campus climates. These findings are relevant because they connect a students' persistence to positive experiences with peers and faculty within predominantly White institutional environments, which were the two site locations for this study.

*Psychological dimensional influences*

The psychological dimension pertains to individuals' environmental perceptions of interactions with racially different groups, as well as interpretations of racial prejudice and racial hostility within the context of higher education (Hurtado, et al. 1998, 1999). Across the campus climate literature several studies have unpacked students' perceptions of environment hostilities based on religion (Muslims), race (Latina/os, Asians) and sexual orientation (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Museus & Truong, 2009; Museus & Maramba, 2011; Shammas 2009; Waldo, 1998; Yosso, et al., 2009). Evans and Broido (2002) found that residence halls in which lesbian and bisexual women lived were seen as having a hostile climate. Due to their LGBT sexual identities these participants experienced feeling uncomfortable and threatened by the unwelcoming environment. Furthermore, LGBT students, like students of color, also experience campus climates as unsupportive and stressful, which deters from their ability to focus on academics and increases the possibility of institutional departure (Hunter & Schaecher, 1990; Lucozzi 1998; Remafedi, 1987; Rotheram-Borus, et al., 1991).

Although there is a clear relationship between campus climate and student perceptions of hostility (Hurtado, et al., 2008), students of color frequently experience their campuses as unwelcoming and more often report acts of discrimination than do their

White peers attending the same institutions (Navarro, et al., 2009; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003; Worthington, et al., 2008). These studies (Worthington, et al., 2008; Navarro, et al., 2009) are relevant because they differentiate between the perceptions of overarching and ethnic/racial campus climates within the same institutions. Findings indicated students' experiences with ethnic/racial agitation significantly predict negative perceptions of overarching and ethnic/racial campus climates. In fact, the Worthington, et al. (2008) and Navarro, et al. (2009) studies highlight the notion that students can experience campus climates differently while attending the same institution, which is relevant to this particular study based on the varied micro-organizational contexts experienced by participants.

*Phenomenological student leadership influences*

Logue, Hutchens and Hector (2005), in order to discern what affects the ways students experience leadership, conducted a phenomenological study with 6 participants. They found a connection between positive student leadership experiences and the people, actions and organizations with which they interacted. Although all the students in the study were White, of traditional college-going age, and held leadership offices in respective organizations, the findings are comparatively applicable to this study because the majority of participants held leadership positions in multiple organizations, all of which are predominantly White. Additionally, two participants were involved in Greek organizations. The primary finding indicated that "the overwhelming message from the students' descriptions of leadership was that it was enjoyable, beneficial, and overall, a positive experience" (Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005, p. 398). Three themes emerged

as impactful on students' positive experiences (i.e., ground) when experiencing leadership: 1) people; 2) action; and 3) organizations. Each of these is explored below.

The first theme, *people*, was described as participants' "interpersonal experiences within the context of student leadership" (Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005, p. 399), and involvement with others, and the social environment therein. Specifically, participants described having a need to have people for whom to work and without which there would be no reason to be a leader. In these instances, people gave participants a purpose and a rationale for leading that directly connected to their need to serve others.

The second theme, *action*, "illustrated the activity level of participants" (Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005, p. 402) and related to how they engaged as student leaders. Participants described themselves as leaders attached to their active pursuit of leadership, as opposed to passively waiting to be chosen to lead. From the theme action three subthemes emerged, which were "getting things done," "success," and "busy lifestyle." Participants discussed having a sense of completion pertaining to effective planning to accomplish goals and complete tasks, assessment of goals met as an outcome of working diligently and balancing responsibilities associated with family, work and school.

The third theme, *organizations*, "referred to the students' awareness of the personal identity that the organization provided for each leader" (Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005, p. 402). Specifically, participants described their leadership experiences as directly connected to each organization, organizational events and activities held. The theme organizations had three subthemes, which included "defining events," "leaders versus members," and "structure." Participants described how their drive to be involved in leadership dealt with the organizational purpose and role, actively embracing their

identity as leaders by differentiating themselves from others and operating within expected divisions of labor and responsibilities.

Both the campus racial climate (Hurtado, et al., 2008) and phenomenological student leadership influences (Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005) negatively shape and positively affect the experiences of students attending predominantly White institutions. Subsequently, these empirical studies provide a reference point from which to examine how the contextual micro-organizational climate enables and restricts African American student leadership practices in historically Black and predominantly White organizations. The next section, which discusses additional student involvement frameworks, allows for the consideration of other factors that may also influence the leadership experiences of African American student leaders.

**Student involvement frameworks**

The connection between student involvement, departure and persistence has been a topic of discussion within the academy for nearly 25 years. The focus is often attributed to Tinto's (1993) interactionalist theory, which is conceptually grounded in the premise that "involvement matters" (Tinto, 1998, p. 168) when determining the extent to which students persist in college. Tinto (1993) recognized student pre-entry characteristics, institutional characteristics, academic integration and social integration, as four identifiable factors that impact student persistence. When applying the interactionalist model (Tinto, 1993), the likelihood of degree completion is directly proportional to a student's ability to successfully integrate both academically and socially within their particular collegiate context; the more successful students are at achieving academic and

social success, the more committed they are to graduating. Tinto (1993), in part, argued that in order for students to achieve necessary levels of integration they must be involved on campus by participating in patterns of interaction that facilitate their full integration into the institution. Specifically, this process is "marked by stages of passage through which individuals must pass in order to persist in college" (Tinto, 1993, p. 94). Additional research frames the benefits of student involvement as: easier adjustment to college, higher persistence rates and increased development of socially responsible leadership (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000; Dugan, 2006).

Although Tinto's (1993) integrationist theory provided a template for determining factors that influence student persistence, the theory is not universally applicable across diverse cultural, racial and socioeconomic categories (Reason, 2009; Rendón, 1994). Various researchers have offered frameworks advancing Tinto's model to include a variety of factors that influence persistence, including overcoming dominant cultural perspectives (Tierney, 1992), managing anticipatory socialization processes and non-college reference groups (Weidman, 1989), financial stressors (Reason, 2009), organizational attributes of colleges (Terenzini & Reason, 2005), organizational behavior, psychological characteristics of students (Braxton, 2001) and even college climate (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). In their findings each of these studies included an element of student involvement as a contributing component for the retention of students or ways in which students aid in their own persistence (Reason, 2009).

Although components vary for describing exactly what involvement looks like in both academic and social settings, each persistence factor can be viewed as building on Astin's (1984) student involvement theory. Astin (1984) positioned "involvement" as the

psychological and physical energy students expend toward educational endeavors. Hence, the amount of energy invested is directly proportional to the degree of involvement achieved, which positively influences persistence. The lynchpin to Astin's (1984, 1993) involvement theory is the notion that a students' involvement is directly proportional to their progress toward degree attainment, as well as their satisfaction with the college experience. This position is bolstered by Astin's (1999) empirical evidence, which found that various positive experiences, stemming from nurturing interactions with faculty and membership in student groups, were directly correlated with successful educational outcomes. Recent research supports this by determining that positive interactions with faculty are indeed predictors of student learning regardless of race (Kuh & Hu, 2001; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Despite this, it is important to note that White students have the highest levels of satisfaction with such professorial interactions, especially when attending PWIs (Schwitzer, Griffin, Ancis & Thomas, 1999), just as African American students experience higher levels of satisfaction when attending HBCUs (Palmer & Gasman, 2006). This difference speaks to the context of student satisfaction and begs the question of why students of color feel less satisfaction with PWIs than their White peers (Hurtado, 1992).

**Literature rationale**

In this study, both servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and transformational leadership theories (Burns, 1978) are considered when examining how African American students experience leadership within student organizations, historically Black and predominately White, that are contextually different as it pertains to race. The findings

were contextually bound and influenced not only by the macro-campus racial climate (Hurtado, 1994; Hurtado, et al., 1998; Jessor, 1978), which was found at each HWI, but also by micro-organizational racial climates. The differences in micro-organizational racial climates influenced both how and why participants led, and the extent to which they believed they could lead (i.e., leader efficacy) in a variety of roles (Hannah, et al., 2008). Although the aforementioned literature is valuable, separately, it does not account for how varied micro-organizational racial climates (e.g., historically Black and predominantly White) shape African American campus engagement and involvement. For the purpose of this study, historically Black organizations are defined as organizations created by African American students for the purpose of social and political uplift of people of African descent, while predominantly White organizations are operationalized as normative organizations created for personal and professional development of members regardless of race. This study contributes to the literature by examining the ways each organizational type, which is bound by race, influence African American students' leadership development and leader efficacy while attending two separate HWIs.

The following overarching queries guided the study:

1) What motivates African American students to join historically Black and predominantly White organizations?
2) How do African American students experience being leaders in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations?
3) How is African American student leader efficacy influenced by leading in historically Black and predominantly White organizations?

**Chapter summary**

In summary, the research concerning student persistence states that academic and social integration of students is based on a variety of factors including students' commitments to their institution, levels of involvement, validation, and perceptions of racial campus climate (Astin, 1999; Hurtado, 1992; Reason, 2009; Rendon, 1994; Tinto, 1993). These factors shape how students interact with the institutional environment (Baird, 1988; Tierney, 1992) and how they experience college in racialized terms (Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007; Smith, et al., 2006), which impacts why they join organizations for affirmation, cultural validation and enhanced leadership opportunities (Kimbrough, 1995; Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 2006; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Although the connection between leadership and efficacy has been researched (Chemers, 1997; Hannah, et al., 2008; McCormick, 2001) there is sparse data on leader efficacy (Hannah, 2006; Hendricks & Payne, 2007; Singer, 1991) and none about how leader efficacy is experienced by African American students in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations. Although African American students have developed leadership abilities in same race, multicultural and majority White organizations (Arminio, et al., 2000; Guiffrida, 2003; Person & Christensen, 1996), their specific modes of leading, based on organizational racial context, have yet to be explored.

In reviewing the literature on African American students' involvement in organizations it is clear that being involved has a positive impact on their leadership development (Fleming, 1984; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001) especially if the organizations are historically Black (Sutton & Kimbrough, 2001; Gallagher, 1973), which in part, is why African American students are involved in

racially homogeneous organizations (Lavant & Terrell, 1994). To some degree, seeingBlack as positive and translating this to seek out cultural organizational sameness on campus (Museus, 2008) stems from how African American students were racially socialized by their parents prior to arriving at college (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Stevenson, 1994), which also positively impacts their persistence (Hirt & Herndon, 1994).

What is not clear is the alignment of how African American students' lead and any particular leadership framework. To enumerate, African American students have exhibited components of the relational leadership model (Komives, Lucas & McMahon, 2006): *purposefully* by being committed to goals; *inclusively* when valuing diversity; *empowering* through promoting the full involvement of participants; *ethically embracing* having values and standards; and *process-oriented* in accomplishing group purposes (Arminio, et al., 2000; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Kimbrough, 1995; Lyons, 1973; Person & Christensen; 1996). However, there has yet to be a single study that explores whether or how African American students use relational leadership. Therefore, there is a need for an understanding of African American student leadership experiences as a template toward learning how these experiences affect African American student leader efficacy. The meanings African American student leaders attach to the ways that organizational context affects their leader efficacy, leadership development, and the implications of those meanings for institutional policy, have not been discovered.

# CHAPTER III

# METHODS

In this chapter, I offer a brief introduction to the study and overarching research questions. I then explain the rationale for utilizing qualitative methods, the paradigms guiding the research, researcher as instrument, study contexts, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, confidentiality and limitations. Together these sections frame how this study was carried out.

## Introduction

Discerning how historically Black and predominantly White student organizational leadership experiences are perceived as either supportive or marginalizing by African American student leaders requires the use of both distal and proximal environmental experiences within the context of campus racial climates (Jessor, 1979; Hurtado, 1994) as lenses to review data. In order to accomplish this, 12 African American student leaders, who attended two historically White Carnegie

doctoral/research extensive universities, participated in this study. Each student served as an individual unit of analysis for the comparative case study. This methodological approach allowed data to be collected through multiple methods to develop "an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning of those involved" (Merriam, 1998, p. 19).

**Qualitative rationale**

To document the lived experiences of African American undergraduates who are leaders within historically Black and predominantly White student organizations at HWIs, and to develop detailed explanations of their shared spaces, a qualitative research method was utilized. According to Creswell (2007), "the focus of all qualitative research needs to be on understanding the phenomenon being explored" (p. 3), which "can only be established by talking to people directly…and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Furthermore, utilizing a qualitative methodology allows for locating participants' perspectives within the observed world (Mertens, 2005) where the phenomenon occurs. Applying qualitative methods allowed me to document participants' descriptions of leadership and leading in a manner that yielded detailed explanations of how they experienced historically Black and predominantly White organizations. To capture the essence of African American student leadership experiences it was essential to enter the world of student leaders and focus on their multiple perspectives, voices, perceptions and behaviors (Litchman, 2006). I captured their experiential perceptions of leadership through in depth interviews, observations and focus groups.

The decision to utilize qualitative methods was supported by the fact that qualitative researchers "study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). Quantitative methods are inadequate for a study of this nature because they are "based on testing a theory composed of variables measured with numbers, and analyzed with statistical procedures, in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory hold true" (Creswell, 1994, p. 2) and because "quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 14). I sought study methods that facilitate describing the depth of issues in great detail, (e.g., rich, thick descriptions), which is unattainable through quantitative methodology.

A qualitative methodology leads to an understanding of how African American participants make meaning of their contextual leadership experiences within a variety of contexts and student organizations. In conducting a study that focuses on multiple individual lived experiences, I am mindful that "human actions cannot be understood unless the meaning that humans assign to them is understood. Because thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values and assumptive worlds are involved, the researcher needs to understand the deeper perspectives that can be captured through face-to-face interaction" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 53), which is why a comparative case study was conducted. In line with understanding participants' meaning-making, I realized that comparative case studies are utilized when collecting in depth information through multiple sources to understand participants' meanings while "closing in" on their life situations (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Merriam, 1998). Although this research informs the academy about African

American student leadership experiences, I am aware that “the goal of a case study is not to generalize the results to all institutions of higher education since the case is influenced by a number of specific and unique factors” (Perna, et al., 2009, p. 6), all of which are considered contextual factors.

**Paradigms guiding the research**

This study describes how African American undergraduates experience leadership within historically Black and predominantly White student organizations. I accepted the narratives of participants as “lived” reflections of their phenomenological realities. In pursuing this research, I was mindful of interrelated assumptions that form my paradigm, constructivism, which is influenced by my critical ontology, epistemology and axiology. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000) “users of this paradigm [constructivist] are oriented to the production of reconstructed understandings of the social world. The traditional positivist criteria of internal and external validity are replaced by such terms as trustworthiness and authenticity” (p. 184). For the purpose of this study, the transactional knowledge gathered informed participants’ experiences across a variety of contexts and it is these informed realities that served as the template for determining emergent themes and subsequent policy and practitioner recommendations.

My constructivist paradigm allows me to maintain a relativist ontology that questions “the out-there-ness' of the world and emphasizes the diversity of interpretations that can be applied to it" (Willig, 2001, p. 13). This enabled me to realize that “individual meanings and, therefore, realities are particular to individuals but may be shared among individuals, that is, constructed within a social context” (Morrow & Smith, 2000, p. 202).

My ontology allows me to see value in the subjective nature constructed as a combination of multiple realities, which in my African American community are transferred through a communal cultural memory, story-sharing and telling. To illustrate, based on numerous intimate conversations with family communal elders, I understand that as an African American male there is inherent danger in being viewed as threatening, aggressive or angry to Whites due to the potential outcome of death, incarceration or professional exclusion. Hence, my interpretation of reality, based on communicated and lived experiences, is relevant in that "reality, according to the constructivist position, is subjective and influenced by the context of the situation, namely the individual's experience and perceptions, the social environment, and the interaction between the individual and the researcher" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). This interpretation allows for the disruption of a single true reality by drawing on multiple lived cultural perspectives, which serve as the template for a racial navigation system. More importantly, utilizing a constructivist paradigm "connects action to praxis and builds on anti-foundational arguments while encouraging experimental and multivoiced texts" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 185) which is ultimately my goal.

Since arriving at the University of Utah in 2008, I have held various on-campus leadership positions from president of the Black Graduate Student Association (historically Black) to chair of the Educational Leadership and Policy Student Advisory Committee (predominantly White). In these positions I have noticed personal, subtle behavioral differences that govern how I interact, speak and dress. These environmental responses are based on what I interpret as the absence or presence of White colleagues and advisors. This realization allows for a shared commonality with participants who had

similar experiences. Therefore, I position myself as an "insider" and while conducting this research I was mindful that:

> The insider perspective enhances the likelihood that individuals will agree to participate and increases trust and openness, thereby eliciting more and better data. However, because of shared culture and experience, both investigators and participants may fall prey to shared assumptions and taken-for-granted meanings, leading the researcher to fail to go into sufficient depth to understand participant meanings or to allow events in the field to go unnoticed or unquestioned because of their familiarity. (Morrow & Smith, 2000, p. 209)

While I share "insider" status with my participants, I also consider my influential role as an "outsider" who has graduate student researcher privileges, as well as organizational leadership knowledge that extends across my undergraduate, master's and doctoral experiences. These experiences could possibly bias the research by shaping the questions I asked, as well as influencing student responses should they view me as an authority on the subject. Conversely, these experiences might have allowed participants to view me as neutral, which could lead to their being more transparent and honest than they would be if I worked at their institutions and was viewed as an institutional "insider." This said, my positionality informed the extent to which I revealed these leadership experiences, as well as how I positioned myself as a colleague-student, not necessarily as just a researcher.

Epistemologically speaking, the African proverb, "it takes a village to raise a child," is central to my way of knowing in that it allows for a focus on the cultural relationship between pupils and teachers, elders and youth, and participants and researchers. In this instance "knowledge consists of those constructions about which there is relative consensus (or at least some movement toward consensus) among those competent (and, in the case of more arcane material, trusted) to interpret the substance of

the construction" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113). In my experience, these relationships occur within socially constructed geographic, familial and communal contexts, based on shared subjective transactions and communicated in an effort to transfer bodies of racialized knowledge. Furthermore, these interactions serve to bolster and magnify the validity of both individual and collective lived experiences allowing for the findings to be literally created as investigations proceeded (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Essentially, a transactional epistemology (Ponterotto, 2005) best describes my perspective on knowledge generation. I see the acquisition of information as stemming from various sources, (e.g., researcher or object of investigation), which allows for an equal and opposite exchange of lived experiential perceptions culminating in the validation of multiple notions about environments, systems and persons. Hermeneutic, dialectical methodology (Ponterotto, 2005) is the cornerstone of my research ideology because I desire to reconstruct previously held constructions of lived realities by comparing and contrasting interactions between and among participants and myself. In doing so, arriving at a distilled consensus is far more likely and perhaps more conducive to developing a better-informed version of individualized constructions than relying solely on individual perceptions without comparing the perspectives.

The aforementioned ontology and epistemology bind and influence my axiology, which is deeply rooted in doing no harm to my elders by honoring their presence through righteous actions. A constructivist paradigm lessens the likelihood of misrepresentation, misinterpretation and dishonoring of participants by allowing a collective knowledge to emerge. This perspective shapes my scientific process in that as the researcher, I am responsible for all participants, especially if they are African American, due to our

collective shared existence as members of the "village." I consider this bias one that is protective in that it reinforces how I conduct research, consider participants as co-constructors and make a conscious effort to never position African American students as culturally deficit even if the findings could be interpreted as such. Although a constructivist paradigm incorporates the meshing of numerous perspectives, ultimately I am guided by an emancipatory research agenda designed to liberate participants from not only oppressive systems, but also from themselves and/or communal circumstances that may not be conducive to individualized liberation, (e. g. breaking communal traditions). Lastly, in contemplating the researcher as instrument role, I consider transparency as essential, requiring the acknowledgment of my value set, which has been shaped by my community and lived experiences.

**Researcher as instrument**

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), "in qualitative studies, the researcher is the instrument" (p. 72), which requires me to evaluate the technical and interpersonal considerations involved in conducting this particular study, reflexivity and my role therein. As a researcher, I have explored my positionality, biases and personal preconceived notions, as well the theoretical perspectives that influence my research style. Additionally, in being reflexive, I am reminded "the researcher plays a pivotal role in the qualitative research process. It is through his or her eyes and ears that data are collected, information is gathered, settings are viewed, and realities are constructed" (Litchman, 2006, p. 12), which shapes the extent to which I explore myself.

As a doctoral student newly relocated to the University of Utah, I was unaware of

the small number of African Americans residing in the state, which left me unprepared for the culture shock I experienced as an on-campus leader in a graduate capacity. I immediately sought some sort of ethnic enclave that would provide a cultural point of commonality; the Black Graduate Student Association represented such a place. Upon joining and becoming vice president in 2009, I realized that although having a cultural organizational network was beneficial, seeking membership in a predominantly White on-campus entity would help navigate the university. The Educational Leadership and Policy (ELP) Student Advisory Committee filled this void.

In viewing both organizations as opportunities to enhance my leadership abilities, I made several assumptions about these organizational memberships, which included the following: 1) they would holistically embrace me as a person and scholar; 2) they would facilitate the creation of a safe space where I could be authentically "Black"; 3) they would receive my research interest and lines of query with enthusiasm and unabridged scholarly support; 4) they would allow for self-refletion; and 5) they would be able to relate to my oppression. Upon being elected organizational chair in ELP, I soon realized subtle behavioral differences in how I interacted, spoke and even dressed. To illustrate, when interacting with White peers, administrators or faculty, I was mindful of not behaving in a manner that might reinforce negative stereotypes about African American males. I made certain to enunciate words nearly perfectly, to articulate my thoughts without hesitation and to present a confident yet nonhostile demeanor at all times. These environmental responses were indeed based on the presence of White colleagues, administrators, faculty and advisors. Each of these assumptions was framed by personal biases that shape how I view being an African American male pursuing a terminal degree

in the state of Utah.

First, due to being passed a cultural memory that positions White people, in general, as controlling systems designed to actively oppress African Americans in perpetuity, I believed my engagement of White students, faculty and staff needed to occur with an extreme hesitancy and only when it furthered my doctoral persistence. Secondly, based on conversations with various African American doctoral colleagues, I believed evoking the term "doctoral student" would instantaneously grant a shielding scholarly privilege that would insulate me from both on-campus and communal racism. I was wrong. Despite being granted the opportunity to pursue a doctorate and having earned master's and undergraduate degrees, I still experienced both blatant and subtle racism from peers, professors and strangers. This realization informed my decision to examine the extent to which African American undergraduates, who are also leaders in historically Black and predominantly White student organizations, experience leadership in student organizations. The primary determining factor in moving forward with this dissertation study was the anecdotal evidence repeatedly heard when casually discussing African American undergraduates' on-campus experiences including being leaders. The leadership similarities were too glaring to ignore; therefore, I decided to conduct the study to determine how African American students realized the shared phenomenon of leading within HWI contexts.

In the spring of 2009, I began meeting various African American undergraduates at the University of Utah, who represented a variety of disciplines, perspectives and interests. While appreciating their differences, I realized they shared a commonality concerning the racial campus climate, which they perceived as primarily negative. Since

there are less than 1% African American students attending the University of Utah, I pondered how being representative of an extreme minority impacted their livelihood, and psychological and psychosocial responses. Additionally, I wanted to learn more about the parallels between their lived experiences and my own. However, due to context, I also realized this small number of African American students was probably not representative of most Carnegie doctoral/research extensive university campuses. This realization led to my decision to conduct this study at two Carnegie doctoral/research extensive university HWI campuses, in an effort to examine the phenomenon at institutions where the African American student populations were greater than 5%.

To inform the queries that guide the study and the African American student leadership experiences therein, a pilot study was conducted in the fall of 2011. The pilot study focused on African American student leadership experiences in predominantly White student organizations at the University of Utah. The findings encompassed the following: positive organizational advisor mentorships, a fluidity of leadership credibility and positional benefits based on peer reinforcements. These findings were instrumental to determining how to conduct the proposed dissertation study. Specifically, although I have a constructivist paradigm, the results led to my decision to conduct an interpretivist case study to examine and compare how the organizational contexts of historically Black and predominantly White organizations affect African American student leadership. In part, I wanted to know if African American students in the former see themselves as empowered, as opposed to when leading in the latter, where they may see themselves as marginalized, which I experienced when leading in both organizational types.

I made the assumption that African American student leaders had a greater likelihood of thriving as leaders if their organizations acted as places of cultural validation and support that buffer perceptions of a negative racial campus climate (Hurtado, et al., 1998). If I am correct, then perhaps a cultural organization, like the Association of Black Students, may serve as a buffer to campus racism as opposed to a predominantly White organization like the Association of Student Government. Furthermore, I believed that if this postulation was valid at the University of Utah, then perhaps it was also valid at other HWIs where African American students are numerically in the minority. Regardless, in unpacking myself, I am aware that "critical reflexivity denotes an understanding of the diversity and complexity of one's own social location and knowing the differences" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 39). Indeed, my aforementioned lived leadership experiences guided my research trajectory and served to make my doctoral process, as well as this dissertation, extremely personal.

In attempting to concentrate on the impact of my personal bias on this interpretivist case study, I highlighted assumptions and preconceptions during the reflexivity process, prior to conducting interviews. This was accomplished by documenting, in a personal journal, my positive and negative experiences in both organizational types. This information enabled me to avoid biasing the study queries and findings by placing my lived experiences on the periphery and allowing for the centering of participants' narratives in an interpretivist manner. Doing so better prepared me to manage the data, while comparing and contrasting their varied perspectives. Therefore, placing my lived experiences at the forefront of the qualitative process enabled:

> …the researcher to investigate the phenomenon from a fresh and open viewpoint without prejudgment or imposing meaning too soon. This suspension of judgment

> is critical in phenomenological investigation and requires the setting aside of the researcher's personal viewpoint in order to see the experience for itself. (Katz, 1987, p. 36-37)

This suspension of judgment was extremely important to this study due to the numerous organizational contexts in which I have led in various leadership capacities throughout educational journeys (i.e., undergraduate through graduate school) I pursued at the time, and my personalized perception of racial campus climate while leading. Additionally, it was important to remember that the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Litchman, 2006), which is why exposing biases and highlighting my leadership experiences weighs heavily in this interpretivist case study.

Additionally, as an African American male, I am aware that "gender filters knowledge" (Denzin, 1998, p. 116), which was a concern due to having 3 male and 9 female African American participants in the study. These gendered differences are extremely important to note, in that "the sex of the interviewer and the sex of the respondent make a difference because the interview takes place within the cultural boundaries of a paternalistic social system in which masculine identities are differentiated from feminine ones" (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 135). To address this issue, I solicited an African American female colleague to review transcripts and coded data to help determine whether female participant experiences were interpreted with a lack of male bias. Furthermore, as an African American male researcher, I also realize "women's voices have been devalued by male chronicles of cultural history even when the men acknowledge female informants; they are overshadowed by the voice of male authority and ascendance in society" (Obbo, 1997, pp. 42-43). Consequently, when analyzing the data, I made an earnest attempt to recognize participants' experiential differences, which

are based on both gendered and racial underpinnings. Finally, I employed reflexivity with the hope of exposing and understanding ideological, cultural and political differences between participants and myself by briefly sharing my leadership experiences as an African American student with participants.

**Study context**

This comparative case study includes two Carnegie doctoral/research extensive university campuses located in the Midwestern U. S. and classified in the following manner: 1) moderately selective urban public; and 2) moderately selective rural public. These particular educational contexts were chosen to compare how African American students experience leadership in two HWI higher educational contexts that are similar in size, yet varied in student populations.

Site One

The University of Southern (SU) is situated in a city of 110,925 residents of which 4,794 are African American (Institutional Department of Commerce, Census 2010). SU is a moderately selective urban public HWI founded by the Southern State Territorial Legislature in 1890. SU is comprised of a main campus and two satellite locations. As of 2010, the SU student body totaled approximately 23,510 (main campus), and enrolled nearly 19,480 undergraduates. SU is 50% male and 50% female with 34% of the students living in college-owned, -operated, or -affiliated housing and 66% of students residing off campus. Minority students make up 22.6% of the student population, while only 7% or 3,200 are African American students (SU Annual Report,

2010). The campus size is 3,914 acres. SU ranks 101st in the Best Colleges and National Universities 2012 edition. SU tuition and fees (2011-12) are $17,427 for residents versus $28,380 for nonresidents. The endowment (2010) is $715,858,000 and the undergraduate admission acceptance rate is 85%. SU has approximately 400 student organizations, of which 55 are multicultural. Sixteen were created to serve African American student populations. These organizations include a few of the following: African and African American Student Advisory Committee, Black Student Association, National Association of Black Journalists and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc.

Site Two

The Southern State University (SSU) is located in a city of 45,688 residents, where 2,152 are African American (Institutional Department of Commerce, Census 2010). SSU is a moderately selective suburban public HWI founded by the Southern State Territorial Legislature in 1890. SSU is comprised of a main campus and four satellite locations. According to 2011 student body calculations SSU is comprised of 18,197 students (main campus), of whom nearly 14,938 are undergraduates. There are 51% male and 49% female students attending SSU, 44% of whom live in college-owned, -operated, or -affiliated housing and 56% of whom reside off campus. Minority students make up 22.6% of the student population, while only 3% or 1,226 are African American (SU Annul Report, 2010). The campus size is 1,489 acres. SSU ranks in the top 150 of the Best Colleges and National Universities (2012). SSU tuition and fees (2011-12) are $7,108 (resident) versus $18,455 (nonresident). The endowment (2010) is $218,102,885, and the acceptance rate is 81.4%. SSU has 390 student organizations; 23 are multicultural

and 9 of those serve African American students. Some of these organizations include African American Business Students Association, African American Student Association, National Panhellenic Council and the National Society of Black Engineers.

**Participants**

Study participants consisted of 12 African Americans, females (9) and males (3), who attended the University of Southern (7) and Southern State University (5). These students held leadership positions in a combined total of 41 historically Black (17) and predominately White organizations (24). Each participant held an elected or appointed position within both a historically Black (e.g., President of the Association of Black of Students) and predominantly White (e.g., Program Chair of Delta Delta Delta Sorority, Inc.) organization.

A purposeful criterion sampling technique was used due to my having a "predetermined criterion of importance" (Patton, 1990, p. 176), defined as the following criteria for participation: 1) self-identified African American; 2) currently held an elected, appointed or volunteered position in both a historically Black and predominately White student organization; and 3) attending one of the two selected HWIs. Applying a purposeful criterion sampling process increased the likelihood that participants each experienced the shared phenomenon of having held leadership positions in an on-campus student organization. These criteria were selected to attract African American participants who had leadership experience.

In order to gain access to participants, the Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) of the University of Southern and Southern State University were sent formal requests for

permission to conduct the research. After securing approval from the University of Utah, SU and SSU Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), each Multicultural Student Office. (MSO) was asked to disseminate information about the study to African American undergraduates. The intent was to secure a list of possible undergraduate participants by requesting the following from each institutional entity: 1) a list of on-campus African American student organizations; and 2) a list of on-campus predominantly White student organizations. Each organization and institutional entity was sent an IRB-approved e-mail stating the research purpose and rationale, and a request for assistance in identifying and contacting participants who fit the study criterion. Additionally, informational flyers were strategically posted on campuses to inform potential participants about the research and opportunity to participate. African American faculty, administrators and staff, whom I know personally, were asked to share information about the study with any students they identified as leaders within student organizations on campus. Nearly 512 were e-mailed; of these, only 3 responded with an interest in participating. Each respondent was sent a letter and consent form describing the study purpose.

In order to aid the reader in distinguishing participants' demographic data, Table 1 is presented.

Because of the low response to the first sampling effort, snowball sampling (Creswell, 2007) was then utilized to locate additional participants. Upon concluding the interview with the first participant, she recommended we go to the University of Southern Office of Student Life to recruit possible participants, where 2 additional students agreed to participate, which then led to recruiting 4 more University of Southern participants. Similarly, after arriving at Southern State University, I met several members of the Alpha

**Table 1**

**African American Student Demographic Data**

| *Name* | *College-going Orgs(*)* | *Institution* | *Class* | *Age* | *GPA* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Barack | 1st Generation | Southern State University | Junior | 21 | 3.01 | 3 |
| Malcolm | 2nd Generation | Southern State University | Senior | 21 | 3.23 | 2 |
| Martin | 2nd Generation | University of Southern | Senior | 22 | 3.65 | 4 |
| Doris | 3rd Generation | Southern State University | Frosh | 19 | 3.30 | 4 |
| Ruby | 2nd Generation | Southern State University | Soph | 19 | 2.50 | 2 |
| Eady | 1st Generation | University of Southern | Senior | 23 | 2.70 | 5 |
| Barbara | 2nd Generation | Southern State University | Soph | 20 | 3.45 | 3 |
| Shawn | 1st Generation | University of Southern | Frosh | 19 | 3.32 | 3 |
| Hazel | 2nd Generation | University of Southern | Frosh | 19 | 3.67 | 4 |
| Jo Anne | 1st Generation | University of Southern | Senior | 21 | 3.42 | 3 |
| Mattie | 2nd Generation | University of Southern | Junior | 21 | 2.95 | 3 |
| Yssis | 2nd Generation | University of Southern | Senior | 22 | 3.45 | 5 |

**(*) Organizations = the total number of organizations participants are leading in regardless of racial context (i.e., historically Black or predominantly White)**

Phi Alpha Fraternity, a historically Black organization, at a membership recruitment-tabling event. After explaining my dissertation research agenda, 2 fraternity members agreed to participate and recruited 2 female students on the spot. The final participant, who overheard our conversation, asked to participate in the study because she was interested in sharing her story as a leader.

Total transparency allows the researcher to be up-front and honest while "avoiding deception, asking permission to record, and being honest about the intended uses of research" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 94). Prior to the interviews, I spoke with participants about their desire to participate and willingness to provide in depth information regarding their leadership experiences while leading in historically Black and predominantly White student organizations. This was done to gain support from participants, which is why I am mindful that "a qualitative researcher conveys to participants that they are participating in a study, explains the purpose of the study and does not engage in deception about the nature of the study" (Creswell, 1998, p. 127). Participants were allowed to select interview sites and times, which developed trust and increased their comfort in speaking in an open manner. After securing participants, I attempted to protect their identities and confidentiality by providing pseudonyms that grant anonymity. In addition, participants were afforded the following: 1) an opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time; 2) the option to request that certain information not be reported; and 3) a chance to review interview data to ensure that their textural and structural descriptions were accurately reflected.

**Data collection**

To understand the leadership experiences of African American students who participate in both historically Black and predominately White organizations, a case study was conducted. According to Yin (2009), robust findings require the examination of multiple cases rather than a single case. For this study each participant served as an individual unit of analysis. To capture detailed participant leadership experiences, in depth interviews, demographic surveys, observations and focus groups were utilized to gather data. Additionally, throughout the data gathering and analysis processes, I wrote memos, which served as a reflexive points "to adjust the protocol and remind interviewers of topics they want to explore in follow-up interviews or approaches to use in interviewing new participants" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 144). These memos enabled me to create a trail of spontaneous thoughts about subtle and blatant pieces of information noticed during the data collection processes to be used as comparison points to data collected by utilizing the aforementioned four data collection tactics.

In depth interviewing

Interviews were conducted with the understanding that "by using interviews, the researcher can reach areas of reality that would otherwise remain inaccessible such as people's subjective experiences and attitudes" (Peräkylä & Russuvuori, 2011, p. 529). In depth interviews served as the primary way to gather participants' perspectives concerning how they experienced leadership within historically Black and predominantly White student organizations. The purpose of utilizing in depth interviews was to allow participants to not only answer the research questions that are pertinent to this study, but

to offer specific individualized details about shared phenomenon. The interview content focused on leadership experiences, leadership efficacy, leadership motivation, and leadership interactions with members and officers within each organizational type. Questions included the following: 1) why did you join your predominantly White/historically Black organization?; 2) how do you feel when discussing organizational issues with your African American peers?; and 3) in what ways do you feel your organizational advisor either empowers or impedes your ability to lead? These questions allowed participants to think about various aspects of their leadership experiences in contextual terms and to explain their views on leadership in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations.

Each participant was required to sign a consent form prior to participating in the interviews and complete a demographic survey after being interviewed, in an effort to gather relevant background data. Each student leader participated in two face-to-face interviews. Students participated in a 90-minute initial interview and a 35-45-minute, in-person follow-up interview to clarify emergent themes. During the interviews participants were asked about social and leadership experiences in historically Black and predominately White student organizations to investigate key moments that shaped their leadership perspectives. Specific emphasis was placed on determining participants' pre-college experiences with leadership (e.g., high school and religious organizations) to investigate key moments that shaped their leadership perspectives outside of the college context. Interview questions were open-ended, which allowed participants to communicate their experiences in a detailed manner (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Interviews were recorded on a digital recorder; two copies of each interview were saved

on a computer and jump drive, in the event that one should be inoperative. Additionally, I transcribed interviews no later than a week after the interview to ensure familiarity with individualized data. In order to avoid jeopardizing participants' anonymity and to build rapport, I conducted interviews at places that were convenient for participants.

Finally, since race is a pretext to conducting this study of undergraduate African American student leaders in historically Black and predominantly White student organizations, I suspected indepth interviews would yield thick descriptions of subjective realities that "can be used to document institutional racism as well as stories of overt personal racism. The interviewing process yields narratives that can be used in building cases against racially biased policies and discriminatory practices" (Dunbar, Rodriguez & Parker, 2003, p. 135). In fact, to a degree this was the case and the narratives served to point out organizational systemic impediments to participants' ability to experience leadership.

Demographic survey

After each interview participants were asked to complete a demographic survey to gather additional data about areas that inform their leadership perspectives including pre-college leadership exposure, parental education and undergraduate major field of study. Participants were asked to return the survey to me electronically. The survey consisted of questions designed to determine participants' leadership activities prior to college, gender and race (Astin, 1997) since different factors influence the retention of students of color and White students (Allen, 1999). Specifically, questions like "what type of organizations are you involved in away from campus," "are you first-generation college going," "what

is your current cumulative GPA" and "did you attend a historically Black or predominantly White high school prior to coming to college" were posed. These types of questions led to a better understanding of the background experiences of each participant, as well as how these experiences impacted present college experiences and informed their leadership perspectives.

## Observations

In deciding to use participant observations, I was aware that "phenomenological purposes may be served whether group interviews are the sole basis for gathering data or are used in association with other techniques" (Fontana & Frey, 2008, p. 127). Observation notes were included in the data corpus because "even in in-depth interviews, observation plays an important role" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 140), which makes them an important part of qualitative inquiry. I observed participants in both historically Black and predominantly White on-campus student organizational contexts to "supplement and clarify data derived from participant interviews" (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 143). The observations were conducted at two organization meetings or activities, and focused on how participants interacted during formal organizational meetings and social events. It is important to note that "because all observers view an object of inquiry from their own vantage points in the web of reality, no portrait of a social phenomenon is ever exactly the same as another" (Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2011, p. 170), which is why participants were invited to review my observation notes. Additionally, field note data were examined to provide overlap of data analysis with data collection, as well as a way to further contextualize the organizations involved (Eisenhardt, 1989). According to

Marshall and Rossman (2011) utilizing observations is important because "when the researcher-as-observer depends on senses other than sight, observations about movement and tone of voice become generative sources of insights" (p. 140).

I compared observation notes within each organizational context, in order to determine participants' differences and similarities in behavior, language, gestures and dress. Reflective notes were taken during and after each observation (Creswell, 2007) for the purpose of informing context juxtaposed with my perceptions of the space, place and participants.

Focus group

According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), focus groups "help the researcher inductively figure out what the key issues, ideas, and concerns are from multiple participants at once" (p. 164). I utilized focus groups as a mode of inquiry to make certain emergent themes reflected as accurately as possible students' perceived notions of experiencing leadership within historically Black and predominantly White student organizations. Due to participants' subjective positionality primary impediments and benefits varied and impacted how their leadership was experienced. This said, the focus group served as a way of locating common central issues surrounding leadership, the value associated with leading, and modes of leading based on several pertinent issues, racial context being primary. Specifically, focus groups were conducted to determine: (a) the meanings students ascribe to how they experienced contextual leadership (e.g., historically Black versus predominantly White organizations); and (b) what variables they credit with their leadership efficacy. Additionally, I chose to utilize focus group

results because “the format allows the facilitator the flexibility to explore unanticipated issues as they arise in the discussion. The results have high face validity; because the method is readily understood, the findings appear believable” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 149).

A 60-minute focus group was conducted at each site; 3 students participated at Southern State University and 5 at the University of Southern. A digital, audio recorder was utilized to document participants’ responses. Focus group questions were semistructured and groups were conducted in settings that were familiar to participants. Lastly, participants were told prior to the focus group that if for any reason, they wished to discontinue participating in the group they could exit via the nearest door without consequences. The focus group served as a mode of member checking to make certain my early interpretations of the interview data accurately described how participants experience leadership across varying organizational contexts. Focus groups were held 3 months after data were transcribed and coded. Specifically, I wanted to ensure that “research participants review evolving domains and theories emerging from the data to see if they reflect and resonate with the experiences of the members of the community” (Yeh & Inman, 2007, p. 383). In doing so, I needed to make certain that my interpretation of participants’ perspectives was accurate; having participants check their narratives increased the likelihood that analyzed data reflected their experiential subjectivity. This experiential subjectivity was essential to assuring the correct representation of their voiced narratives prior to beginning the data analysis process.

**Data analysis**

To develop this interpretivist case study, interview and focus group transcripts, observational notes taken in the field and demographic survey data were analyzed. According to Yin (2009), to garner robust case study findings, one must examine multiple cases rather than a single case. I analyzed each participant's case individually, then comparatively in a cross-case synthesis manner to determine categorical similarities and differences (Eisenhardt, 1989) and to compare behaviors, issues and contexts with regard to each particular case (Stake, 1995).

To prepare the data for coding, after each interview the completed informed consent form, transcript and corresponding observational "descriptive notes" were filed by assigned pseudonyms and labeled with the corresponding results of participants' narratives in effort to ensure data interpretation matched each participant.

To analyze transcribed data, I employed the processes suggested by Creswell (2007):

> Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data (i.e., text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion. (p. 148)

In this study, an open line-by-line coding, constant comparative method of data analysis was utilized to determine themes from each participant's data (Merriman, 1998). The following quote relating to the emergent theme of *Fluidity of Blackness*, where Blackness is a benefit, illustrates the process of line-by-line coding. Mattie, Events Chair of the National Association of Black Engineers, stated:

> Attending an institution where there are few of us is at times scary because you have to search for understanding. We have a community here, so when we address our issues no one ever questions whether we are lying, biased or exaggerating because Black people always play the race card when we don't get our way. We're believed here. That matters.

The data was coded as such:

> Attending an institution (attending an institution) where there are few (being part of a few) of us is at times scary (being scared) because you have to search for understanding (searching for understanding). We have a community here (having a community here), so when we address our issues (addressing our issues) no one ever questions (not questioned) whether we are lying, biased or exaggerating (not lying) or (being biased) because Black people always play the race card when we don't get our way. We're believed here (being believed here). That matters.

After coding each participant's transcript, line-by-line as shown, individual thematic codes were determined for each participant by using a "broad brush-stroke representation called holistic coding" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 19). Once individual thematic codes were determined they were analyzed in a cross-case manner as suggested by Yin (2009). The data were then arranged in thematic segments as emergent themes.

For the purposes of this study, since each participant also represented an individual unit of analysis, each line-by-line code was placed in parenthesis, arranged in thematic segments, and compared across participants to arrive at the final emergent themes. In order for this to take place, I "…read transcripts in their entirety several times. Immerse [myself] in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts" (Agar, 1980, p. 103), which supported the organization of data into line-by-line categories, thematic segments and emergent themes. These steps were taken to ensured inductive analysis (Patton, 2002), which leads to identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief that link people and settings together (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Emergent commonalities and differences were examined to provide substantiated meaning. As Patton (2002) noted, "interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of the findings, offering examinations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing

order" (p. 480). With this approach, I ensured that meanings about the collective shared essence of leadership stemmed from a "thick description" of participants' experiences (Denzin, 1989). These "thick descriptions" not only allowed for the essence of the experience to be explained, but they purposefully positioned it within a social action, racialized context and participant intentionality thereby creating a "thick meaning." This ensured that the findings lead "readers to a sense of versimilitude, wherein they can cognitively and emotively place themselves within the research context" (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 543), which was essential since participants experienced two uniquely different leadership contexts.

**Truthworthiness**

According to Yeh and Inman (2007), "Validity/trustworthiness refers to the authenticity and consistency of interpretations grounded in data" (p. 386). To build trustworthiness, one question must be posed and ultimately answered: "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of?" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). In order to enhance the study's trustworthiness (Merriam, 1998), I employed three strategies: 1) triangulation; 2) member checks; and 3) rich, thick description.

Methodological triangulation

Triangulation utilizes multiple points of data to confirm emerging findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) in order to understand the researched phenomenon under study (Mathison, 1988). Multiple sources of data were utilized to reveal the uniqueness of

leadership experienced by participants (Merriman, 1998) including face-to-face in depth interviews, field notes, and direct observations (Yin, 2009). The primary purpose of utilizing methodological triangulation is to allow various data sources to substantiate students' experiences of the phenomenon. Through triangulation, I was able to determine how participants experienced leadership not only in different organizational types, but also across varying institutional contexts. According to Litchman (2006), "qualitative researchers take the view that if they collect data from multiple sources they can have a more accurate picture of things and thus remain less biased" (p. 13). The similarities found across institutional contexts were supported because participants, within different student organizations, at different HWIs shared the same experiences. In choosing to compare the data in a triangular manner, I am mindful that data are "valid because researchers go through this process and rely on multiple forms of evidence rather than a single incident or data point in the study" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). Additionally, in considering each participant as a unit of analysis, and mindfully triangulating their experiences in a methodological manner, I was aware that doing so accurately verified emergent themes that resonated across contexts. Making certain the interpretations of students' lived experiences were accurate amplified their voices around perceived leadership experiences in each organization; to misrepresent these voices would most certainly be unethical.

### Member checks

Member checks, in case studies, consist of allowing participants to review data derived from interviews to determine the extent to which results are plausible and

represent accurate accounts of their lived experiences (Yin, 2009). In this study, member checking consisted of participants reviewing transcribed interviews and emergent interpretations to determine accuracy of information rendered, which built rapport between participants and myself by instilling confidence in the process. Participants offered additional nuanced descriptions about their contextualized leadership experiences, which allowed for greater understanding of how being in historically Black versus predominantly White organizations influenced their leadership development and leader efficacy. Plus, participants participated in postinterview focus groups at both Southern State University and the University of Southern. Focus groups were conducted after transcribing interviews and analyzing the data in order to gather participants' feedback concerning emergent themes. According to Stake (1995) member checking offers participants the following opportunities:

> To examine rough drafts of writing where the action and words of the actor are featured, sometimes when first written up but usually when no further data will be collected from him or her. The actor is asked to review the material for accuracy and palatability. The actor may be encouraged to provide alternative language or interpretation but is not promised that that version will appear in the final report. (p. 115)

Providing participants with this opportunity better allowed for the application of an interpretivist process when analyzing the data. It also developed a better understanding of how leadership was experienced by participants within two separate organizational types and contributed to the authenticity and consistency of data interpreted, which helped ensure trustworthiness.

Rich, thick descriptions

Rich, thick description provides readers with enough robust detailed information concerning participants' experiences to determine the ways in which findings can be

transferred and applied to similar research situations (Merriam, 1998). Specific to case studies, it is important that thick descriptions provide protection against narrative fallacy by explaining in great detail how participants experienced the individual and group phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2011). In this study, comparing participants' detailed narratives at two HWIs allowed for a better understanding of the similarities experienced and the transferability therein. According to Creswell and Miller (2000):

> The purpose of thick description is that it creates verisimilitude, statements that produce for readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described in a study. Thus, credibility is established through the lens of readers who read a narrative account and are transported into a setting or situation. (p. 127)

To develop these descriptions participants were asked questions that allowed them to describe, in detail, their leadership experiences based on the context in which they lived. The initial interviews were followed with secondary interviews, as well as focus groups to provide additional opportunities to describe in depth the similarities and differences found when leading in historically Black and predominantly White organizations. As the researcher, I am aware that gathering thick, rich data does not thick, rich description make, which is why I utilized an interpretive method of triangulation when describing how participants experienced leadership. In doing so, I assured that various points of information would aid in amplifying participants' voices by thoroughly describing their perspectives.

**Ethical considerations**

Mason (1996) stated "reflexive research means that the researcher should constantly take stock of their actions and their role in the research process and subject

these to the same critical scrutiny as the rest of their 'data'" (p. 6). To avoid reflexive considerations, which allow me to recognize how I am situated within the research, power dynamics between participants and myself, as well as the extent to which this research could negatively impact participants, would be unethical. Consequently, I dedicated a considerable amount of thought toward how both community entrance and departures should occur.

Both Southern State University and the University of Southern have current employees with whom I share fraternity ties, who facilitated the research process by using their campus positions as African American student advisors to help recruit participants. I spent time in conversation within the African American community both on- and off-campus for approximately 5 to 7 days prior to conducting interviews, observations and focus groups. This rapport building helped develop trusting relationships prior to conducting the study. The issue of negotiating entry/exit to both the site and population was one of great concern because although I am an outsider to each site location, I was granted access as if I were a member of the local campus community due to being an African American student researcher.

In exiting each campus, with the promise of allowing for member checking and reciprocity, I attended a historically Black organization meeting where I informed the African American students in attendance that after arriving at preliminary findings, I would return to conduct focus groups for member checking purposes. Additionally, I offered to conduct a social justice leadership workshop training session, which I did at each institutional site. Upon concluding the member checking, through focus groups, I

departed from each campus to return to Utah and begin writing the findings and implications sections of my dissertation.

In an effort to accomplish the aforementioned strategy, I immersed myself in multiple research environments for approximately 30 days, nearly 15 days per institution, to conduct interviews and observations. Afterwards, I transcribed interviews, coded data and then returned to conduct focus groups for member checking purposes. I am aware that direct proximity to potential participants was an immediate consideration toward building rapport and meeting the demands of reciprocity (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). As mentioned earlier, I shared with participants, in brief, my leadership experiences in both historically Black and predominantly White student organizations in an effort to show commonality and build rapport.

Interpersonal ethical considerations deal with the removal of "academic armor," which includes academic language, professional demeanor and assumptions of privilege (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and allows for a personable interaction, casual conversation and the building of trust. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006) "dropping the academic armor allows richer, more intimate acceptance into the ongoing lives and sentiments of participants" (p. 78). I am aware of the ethics of reciprocity in this process, which is why I was determined to "give back" to students by conducting social justice leadership workshops not just for participants, but the entire African American student community on their campuses. This was done in effort to "give back" to students who participated in the study and in accordance with the suggestion of Marshall and Rossman (2006) that "reciprocity may entail giving time to help out, providing informal feedback, making coffee, being a good listener, or tutoring" (p. 81). Additionally, I attempted to

make certain I was not deceitful, acting nefariously or unethically by not being forthcoming about the study. In part, the aforementioned was accomplished by having transparent discussions with participants about my leadership experiences as an undergraduate, which served as the catalyst for wanting to conduct this study.

**Confidentiality**

Kvale (1996) posited "Confidentiality in research implies that private identifying data of the subject will not be reported" (p. 114). To ensure that participants were fully aware of the study purpose, in addition to having participants complete IRB approved forms, I personally explained the study process. After each interview, participants were given a pseudonym to protect their identities. According to Creswell (1998) "A researcher protects the anonymity of the informants, for example, by assigning numbers or aliases to the individuals" (p. 76). Although personal data was kept confidential the information discussed during the focus group was not necessarily completely confidential since the members of the focus group may disclose it to others. Additionally, data and records were stored in a locked filing cabinet and on a password protected computer located in my personal workspace. Only I had access to this information. In closing, hopefully the aforementioned ethical considerations enabled me to make certain participants were fully protected throughout this process.

**Chapter summary**

In this chapter, the qualitative rationale, paradigms guiding the research, researcher as instrument subjectivity, study context, participant selection, data collection,

data analysis, truthworthiness, ethical considerations, confidentiality and limitations were addressed in detail. With regard to having shared participants' experiences of leading in both historically Black and predominantly White student organizations as an undergraduate and graduate student, this commonality shaped my respect for their narratives and served as a point of solidarity. Due to the belief that conducting qualitative research, and being a leader are highly subjective (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Northouse, 2010), I purposefully attempted to manage participants with cultural and personal care to accurately represent their lived experiences. In making certain to appropriately utilize qualitative research methods a comparative case study analysis was employed to collect in depth information through multiple sources to understand participants' lived experiences (Flyvberg, 2006; Merriam, 1998). I am mindful that each research site has a history of excluding African American students by limiting their institutional access solely based on race, particularly by not granting admittance to Black students throughout the early 1900s until approximately 1950.

In utilizing purposeful criterion sampling, African American student leaders who lead in both historically Black and predominantly White student organizations were identified through snowball sampling, to participate in the study. Each face-to-face interview was digitally recorded, transcribed, and coded. Furthermore, observations, a demographic survey and focus group information, which was also digitally recorded, were utilized in data analysis. Through member checks, rich, thick descriptions, and methodical triangulation a trustworthy interpretation of the data yielded the findings presented in Chapters IV and V. Recognizing the researcher/participant power dynamics, attempting to develop a genuine rapport with participants, and acknowledging local

histories all demonstrate due diligence related to the ethical conduct of research. The leadership experiences of these African American students offered valuable perspectives for the academy and practitioners, as well as African American peers concerning how their leader efficacy is developed. These properties are presented and discussed in the following chapters.

# CHAPTER IV

## THE BLACKER THE BERRY…

This chapter provides thick, rich descriptions of each student participant, which by design contributes to the trustworthiness of this dissertation. The details contained in a series of vignettes offer specific insight into the lives of the 12 African American students who participated in this dissertation study by allowing the reader to gain a deeper understanding of each leader. Before the focus group interviews, each participant chose a pseudonym to replace their actual name; these pseudonyms are used throughout this chapter and Chapter VI to help the reader identify each leader, as well as distinguish between participants' leadership narratives.

The upcoming vignettes provide but a glimpse into the lived experiences of each study participant. This information reflects participants' experiences prior to college, their leadership in historically Black and predominantly White organizations, and their immediate tentative postgraduation plans, which include: attending graduate school, serving Black communities, and entering the workforce. Table 2, presented below, is

**Table 2**

**African American Student Organizational Ties**

| *Name* | *Organizations* | *Title* |
|---|---|---|
| Barack (JP) | Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. (HB) | Chaplain |
| | Alpha Kappa Psi Business Fraternity (PW) | Social Chair |
| Malcolm (JW) | African American Student Association (HB) | President |
| | National Residence Honor Society (PW) | Parliamentarian |
| Martin (AW) | Black Student Association (HB) | Treasurer |
| | Camp Crimson (PW) | Camp Coordinator |
| Doris (RM) | National Association of Black Engineers (HB) | Program Coordinator |
| | Collegiate Role Models for Educating (PW) | Mentor |
| Ruby (NW) | African American Student Association (HB) | Assistant Treasurer |
| | SSU Hall Government (PW) | Floor Advisor |
| Eady (MR) | NAACP (HB) | President |
| | Integrity Counsel (PW) | Peer Juror |
| Barbara (LC) | African American Student Association (HB) | Vice President |
| | SSU Hall Government (PW) | President |
| Shawn (KC) | Freshman Action Team (HB) | President |
| | Layton Residence Student Association (PW) | President |
| Hazel (BL) | Freshman Action Team (HB) | Social Chair |
| | Delta Delta Delta (PW) | Program Chair |
| Jo Anne (OM) | Black Student Association (HB) | President |
| | SU Spanish Club (PW) | Treasurer |
| Mattie (QA) | National Association of Black Engineers (HB) | Events Chair |
| | Gamma Theta Theta (PW) | Intake Cochair |
| Yssis (JT) | Delta Sigma Theta (HB) | Vice President |
| | Pi Phi Honor Society (PW) | Events Chair |

**HB = Historically Black Organizations PW = Predominantly White Organization**

meant to aid the reader in distinguishing participants' demographic data.

**Participant profiles**

The following summation of participants' profiles is intended to establish familiarity with each leader who participated in this study. The 12 African American leaders who participated in this study represented a variety of historically Black and predominantly White organizations, as well as leadership titles.

**Barack Callis**

During Barack's sophomore year at Southern State University he decided to become more involved on campus, because he felt isolated. Barack joined Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. As a first-generation, junior, marketing major Barack often finds himself involved in both social and professional leadership positions. When asked how he defines leadership, he offered the following: "the act – leadership is the act of, uh, leading in a literal and positive manner and also sacrificing things to get better things accomplished." Barack gets his scholarly drive from his parents, Paul and Edith, who have encouraged him at every turn to become the first person in the family with a college degree. Growing up in a lower-middle class, urban, predominantly White neighborhood, Barack learned what it means to be a leader from the numerous roles he played in athletics. "It seems like I've been a captain of a team for like a million years. Sports is all about winning, but it has taught me one crucial thing about leading; we win together, we lose together."

Prior to arriving at Southern State University Barack attended the racially diverse

John Marshall High School where he was also active in sports, the school newspaper, and Black history club. “Being in high school prepared me to interact with different people from different backgrounds. The best part about it was making life-long friends and learning how to write as a reporter!” Barack utilizes the inferential skills he learned as a reporter in several of his organizational leadership positions, including the Alpha Kappa Psi Business Fraternity, Inc., a predominantly White organization, in which he is the Social Chair. “I joined my business frat because I think it will prepare me to get a job with an oil/gas company once I’m done. Plus, everyone in the organization is extremely positive and has similar business related interest.” Barack’s passion for being involved has increased since he began his college education.

> When I first arrived, I was the quiet type, which I think held me back. Joining A-Phi helped break me out of the shell, plus, it is filled with other Black males who aspire to be great; it was the perfect fit for me!”

Barack wants to get the best out of his college experience and believes being involved in as many ways as possible will contribute to becoming a global citizen upon graduating. In part, he desires to be as equipped as he can because “that real world is waiting for a brother and it is as cold as a Chicago winter minus a bomber!” His preparation to enter the “real world” is contingent upon being fully prepared through his leadership experiences:

> College is probably the last time I’ll have to mix with a variety of kids, from different places, with different perspectives about life, grad school, getting put on after graduation and everything else. So I got to be everywhere all at once in order to take advantage of all opportunities presented; being involved in organizations is a way to accomplish that…

Desiring to “mix with a variety of kids,” Barack has had a few challenges that at times have made him hesitant to continue pursuing leadership roles. Specifically, he is mindful

that being a leader has increased his visibility, which has caused him to vacillate between his personal and leadership identities more frequently than he prefers. To illustrate, he offers the following:

> The one thing I'm starting to hate is being me versus who I am as a leader. I mean, I'm laid back, but because I never want to be seen as soft, I have to do the iron fist, silk glove thing. I just wish I could be the same all the time, just me minus the politics of leadership. I mean people never forget how they are treated and at times can't separate the two so I have to be careful. It's frustrating.

Frequently negotiating his identity, Barack realized that overcoming organizational impediments was a characteristic of a leader he hoped to maintain despite his frustration. Furthermore, as a leader for a variety of constituencies Barack learned to prioritize the importance of knowing when to lead and when to follow. "In most situations I take charge, but there are times when I have to decide to push others into opportunities that will enhance their leadership ability. Doing so allows me to put me down and pick them up." Admittedly, Barack realizes leadership is a continual process that takes time and will never be perfected because "I change every day just like the circumstances of my life and organizations. I need to be open to adjusting because this leadership stuff is 24/7!" This insight about the patience involved in leading has served him well and continues to be a primary reason Barack occupied leadership positions throughout his first 3 years of college.

**Malcolm Chapman**

Malcolm is President of the African American Student Association, and serves as Parliamentarian for the National Residence Honor Society. Malcolm is a second-generation, senior, biology major who attends Southern State University where he lives

on campus in residential housing. Prior to attending college, he went to a suburban, predominantly White high school where his family was 1 of only 6 African American families within a community of 60 homes. Both of Malcolm's parents have bachelor's degrees and although they both work long hours causing them to be away from home for extended periods of time, they were influential in helping Malcolm learn the value of an education. "I was 11 when my father was working on finishing his undergraduate and my mom already had her degree. Seeing the work he put in made me want to work harder in school. They inspired me to do college!" Because his parents valued education, Malcolm was highly involved in high school where he participated in track, theater, football and Distributive Educational Clubs of America (DECA).

> I really miss high school! It was definitely a place where I could be myself and because I was African American, and there weren't many of us, I was noticed, but not always appreciated. Those who noticed me ended up being my best friends [White], and those were the people who helped me get through high school. Those were the days because I learned a lot by being involved. I think that's where I learned to be a leader.

Upon graduating from high school, Malcolm came to Southern State University with a desire to make a difference and further learn how to develop as a leader. As a freshman he joined two organizations that guided his leadership perspective and began to shape his understanding of what it meant to be a leader: the African American Student Association and Freshman Mentor Advocates. When asked about his take on leadership he offered the following insights:

> Leadership – uh, I think leadership is pretty much being able to take that step and stand up and, and do everything that's necessary to – for an organization to continue to move and continue functioning. And that's, that's not something that's necessarily – that you're necessarily born with.

Although he was active in both the African American Student Association and Freshman

Mentor Advocates, during Malcolm's first 2 years in college he only participated by serving on committees. "Initially, I just wanted to get my feet wet, find out about the organizations before I decided to run for elected leadership positions." His decision to not seek elected positions was purposeful and beneficial because it allowed him to witness peers enacting leadership in their roles, which influenced his way of leading. In fact, learning how to lead by watching was instrumental to his leadership development:

> You can see leadership in action, what works, what fails, then determine how to apply it to your way of doing things. Kind of like mixing and matching. The best thing is I've learned how to be patient, but serious about timelines. Leadership, for the most part is about doing what you say you will do when you say you will do it. We all have things to do, papers to write and other things so being dependable is important!

Upon graduating Malcolm plans to go to medical school and sees participating in leadership roles as key to learning the intangibles of leadership such as when to empower followers or restrict their membership privileges. Throughout his 4 years at Southern State University Malcolm has experienced trepidation and success as a leader on campus, which contributed to his realistic expectations about being involved.

"Organizations are filled with people who have real problems and issues, which are sometimes in the mix. I mean, I've lowered my expectations of followers because I know school comes first so my plan B is always in motion." Knowing when to push followers versus lightening up is one of Malcolm's greatest leadership qualities, and according to him this is what separates him from other leaders. He confirms this self-assessment by recalling his successful ascent to the African American Student Association President:

> As a leader people see me as a deliverer who gets things done. Being elected as the AFRO AM President is definitely the greatest accomplishment of my time in college because it was achieved as a vote by the people. I mean I'm not perfect,

> but there's no better feeling than knowing my people believe in me and support my efforts to lead them. Really satisfying!

Malcolm's acceptance of responsibility for leading his African American peers is central to his leadership perspective and a primary motivator behind the comfort he finds in knowing his peer community believes in him as "their" leader.

**Martin Jones**

Martin, who is a senior attending the University of Southern, has a simple explanation of leadership:

> To me it's, uh, doing what needs to be done. Doing things that will help influence or help uplift your local area, like the giving of yourself despite your circumstances; leadership can come at different times.

Although Martin understands that leadership sometimes requires leaders to be self-sacrificing, this was not always the case. Prior to arriving at University of Southern he attended a predominantly White high school where his popularity often made it easy for him to get a pass on being a leader.

> Back in the day I was known by everyone because I was a popular singer so people always gave me a pass. I mean sometimes I got offers to do my homework, to buy me lunch or whatever. I didn't have to work hard at all, but college is totally different because you can't just ride on popularity. Here your work speaks for itself and no one wants to work with a slacker!

As a marketing major, who is involved in several projects across campus, Martin rarely finds time for himself, which is frustrating yet rewarding. "At this point, all I have time to do is study and make sure my orgs function properly. I wish I had a few breaks, but breaking could cause things to get out of order and I ain't having that!" He continues, "when my efforts meet my expectations I feel accomplished, which cancels out not being able to have a personal life." As Treasurer of the Association of Black Students and

Camp Crimson Camp Coordinator, Martin keeps himself immersed in numerous opportunities that require his leadership abilities and major skill set. “Each of these organizations is driven by membership and support of the people. So even though I deal with numbers and programming, I also offer advice about marketing our events.”

In order to pay for school Martin has received scholarships for the last 4 years, enabling him to avoid working, which allowed for leadership engagement. “Scholarships make a world of difference because they pays my bills and frees up my time so I can get into more leadership opportunities. If I had to work like most students I definitely wouldn’t be as busy with my organizations.” Additionally, Martin receives financial support from his parents who want him to have as few distractions to learning as possible. As college graduates, his parents believe in the value of an education and have instilled those values in Martin, who notes, “an education is a ticket to a better life.” Growing up in an urban, predominantly White neighborhood, Martin was also exposed to the value of receiving a multicultural high school education, which influenced his desire to go into marketing. “I used to create these little jingles to all types of music, everyone love it! I knew then in order to sell anything the message has to be targeted to everybody, not just one group.” His exposure to a diverse high school environment also guides his drive to lead in multicultural terms because, “it’s important to see the big picture as a leader, which includes attempting to be inclusive.” Martin’s multicultural awareness has served him well throughout his college experiences, and has made navigating the University of Southern less difficult.

Malcolm reminisces about an interaction between himself and a White peer who was interested in joining the Association of Black Students, but was hesitant to do so:

> I remember her asking me whether ABS was a safe place for herself or White students in general. I was thinking, why wouldn't it be? She had assumptions about the organization because of the name; she thought it was only for us [Black]. Made me realize being inclusive isn't just about your membership, it's about how you promote the organization's events, programs and even the name. Sometimes when I'm in my White organizations, although none of them are name "the White student something," I don't always feel comfortable. Guess it depends on a lot of things.

Martin went on to say that discussion made him sensitive to people's perceptions about organizations and even him as a leader. For now, he has arrived at the conclusion that "as a leader, how I'm viewed is how we [African American students] are viewed," which speaks to his connectedness to being a Black student and his awareness of the responsibility of not reinforcing peer stereotypes by enacting exemplary leadership. Upon graduating Martin plans on securing a job within a large marketing firm with a global reach.

**Doris Adams**

As program coordinator for the National Society of Black Engineers and member of the Collegiate Role Models for Educating, where she is a program mentor, most of Doris' time is spent studying, attending organizational meetings and adjusting to attending classes at Southern State University. As a member of four organizations, while maintaining a 3.30 GPA, she has learned to see college as an end to a career means that requires an investment of significant amounts of time in order to reap the expected benefits. "I have been told time and time again by my Gramps that in order to win you have to play to win, which takes practice. What he really means is sacrifice now and relax later." Doris is a third-generation college student so becoming an engineer was a forgone conclusion; the process of becoming an engineer was modeled by her mother who is also

an engineer. “Moms has definitely shown me the game, especially about what it takes for a woman to make it in the field filled with men; so I pay close attention because I don’t want my ideas to get used.”

While being groomed to become an industrial and management engineer by her mother, Doris also learned the value of being a leader who takes control:

> Uh, I define leadership as taking the initiative to organize and I guess lead a group of people or a project or something of that nature, taking a large amount of responsibility to make sure that something is done and it’s done to the best of your ability. Yeah, that’s probably it.

While being in control as a leader is important to Doris, controlling her academics allows her to participate in leadership opportunities on campus. “I’m here to graduate, so it’s important to balance my school stuff with participating outside of the classroom. The better my grades, the more involved I’ll be because my dad ain’t having an unsuccessful daughter!” Although Doris is also pursuing a double minor in business management and mathematics, she often finds gaps in her academic schedule for leadership involvement; however, she is clearly a scholar first.

Prior to attending Southern State University, Doris attended a predominantly White high school where her love of math helped her graduate 16th in a class of 545. Due to her popularity as a high school student she learned how to hone both inter- and intrapersonal communication skills, which she has used in college to secure a paid mentorship. She serves as a mentor to incoming freshmen within the College of Engineering Architecture and Technology for the first 8 weeks of school when she is paid approximately $300 per week. To secure this mentor role she participated in face-to-face interviews, a mock mentoring session and wrote an essay about the value of mentoring. Although Doris was raised in a suburban, predominantly White neighborhood, where

both of her parents are employed, attending college came with a requirement—find an additional source of income. The bourgeoning mastery of her ability to communicate has definitely enhanced her leadership.

"Communicating appropriately is a key to leading! I'm a good talker, but I'm a great leader. I say exactly what I mean and followers love when you mean what you say and know what you're talking about." Doris felt this insight guided her to be thoughtful when interacting with other leaders and followers especially when trying to push her agendas forward.

> When stating my thoughts about anything I make sure I'm not trying to change the person's mind, which is why I communicate so they understand my point. If I can get you to listen first, you'll consider my points long after we're done talking.

This strategy has facilitated Doris' participation at leadership tables and in relevant meetings because peers see her as amicable as opposed to confrontational. Doris' willingness to make subtle changes in her communication style illustrates her dedication to bettering herself as a leader and incorporating critiques like being amicable in her leadership.

Although she is on trajectory to earn an engineering degree, Doris plans on pursuing an MBA at the University of Southern to prepared her to run her own engineering nonprofit designed to educate underrepresented youth who have an interest in the science, technology, engineering or math (S.T.E.M.) fields. "Just like my mom and dad exposed me to engineering and being excellent maybe I can do the same for another young girl or boy. After all, if you can't give back, then why are you working?"

**Ruby Alexander**

Ruby was raised in an urban, predominantly Black neighborhood by her mother and father whom she refers to as "nearly Malcolm and Betty Shabazz" and who instilled a profound sense of Black pride in their daughter. Her parents see education as essential for African Americans to have any meaningful social mobility, which is partly why Ruby's mother earned an associates' degree and her father has a bachelor's degree. Attending and graduating from a predominantly Black high school Ruby learned the value of Blackness, doing community service within the Black community and taking care of her elders. Socialized to see African American culture in extremely positive terms, Ruby has grown to see her role in the Black community as primary above everything else.

"I come from a village so it's my responsibility to hunt and bring the resources home. My community comes first; they raised me." The "they" she refers to includes both her nuclear and fictive kin families. Prior to arriving at Southern State University, Ruby's father taught her the benefits of being selfless, which included being seen as dependable, aspiring to never be selfish, having a community-centered perspective and learning to act through consensus. Although she is just a sophomore, Ruby occupies two important leadership positions: Assistant Treasurer of the African American Student Association and Floor Advisor of Southern State University Dennison Hall, located in the Kace Resident Building. Each of these positions requires Ruby to critically listen, understand the desires of constituents and follow-through on group agendas, all of which tie into being a selfless leader. According to Ruby "leading is about knowing when to sit down and when to stand up and doing so is based on understanding what people want

from you as a leader."

When asked to define leadership Ruby summarizes it as adaptable and changing based on "something that is kind of adopted in certain circumstances of like peers. Basically you become the person to step up, be a leader, like lead your peers." As a business marketing major she often has opportunities to prove her abilities to step up, especially within the classroom.

> I love my Internet media marketing course, it allows me to cross social media with standard media to get the message out. This semester we branded our group, the "Alter-natives" since it was all kids of color. I wrote the scripting for all the visuals in our PSA; afterwards, the group selected me to be the brand manager so I did the timeline too. The project was great! I did what I was supposed to, but helped everyone get a role too. Cooperative leadership, that's what I do!

These classroom moments, though difficult at times when simultaneously creating ideas while delegating group tasks to others, have been the catalyst for Ruby to embrace the art of asking people how they want to participate and then creating those opportunities.

Ruby, who is a second-generation college student, lives on campus in residential housing where she has a variety of leadership examples to draw on, especially as it pertains to knowing when to lead.

> My R.A. Jacob is the business! He is efficient, supportive and knows how to get people in the Dennison RH involved. He's quiet natured, but can get loud. He's so cool, that what I like most. He sets a great example!

Aside from spending time involved on campus in leadership roles, Ruby frequently returns home in order to stay grounded and relax. "I really miss sleeping in my bed at the house, mama's food and hearing daddy read to me. Things are so much more peaceful there than anywhere, especially here. You know. No drama. Down to earth people."

Southern State University is located only 23 miles from Ruby's home, which is the primary reason Ruby chose to attend Southern. She also receives a grant from the

university, which minimized her expenses. Finances have always been a concern for Ruby, which made her college choice list short, and limits her social options and opportunities to attend professional conferences within her major. Despite the lack of monies Ruby is confident that she will enter the field of sports broadcasting and make a name for herself as she aspires to one day work for the ESPN network.

**Eady Black**

As a senior, artistic expression and social issues major with a minor in African and African American studies, Eady is often stressed about transitioning from college into the workforce. Additionally, because she is a first-generation college student intervening familial issues sometimes take precedence over studies. In fact, Eady's active involvement in leadership often serves as an escape from her family situation.

> There are so many expectations, it's almost like they think I'm going to win the lottery once I graduate. I mean it's too much at times so to avoid it all I stay here [on campus] as long as possible since I live at home.

Although her family is a continual source of trepidation, much of the stress Eady experiences comes from being involved in five organizations, which requires large amounts of time and energy. "Aside from studying I have a lot to do. When I accomplish my goals I'm super excited, but until then I'm pulling out my hair trying to cope with the weight! Everybody wants my time."

Her most prominent roles are in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as local Chapter President, and Integrity Counsel, where she serves as a Peer Juror. In these capacities Eady is charged with not only guiding the leadership development of younger peers, but also determining the academic future of

students who have violated the University of Southern plagiarism policy. Each position comes with a variety of issues and stressors that can distract Eady. “Sometimes I feel guilty because I know that even though people plagiarized, doesn’t mean they are bad people, but they still need to be punished.” Although Eady realizes that at times peoples’ actions force her to make decisions they may not like, she sees it as part of the leadership process. “I make choices and hopefully everybody wins. All leaders have to make choices, just sometimes I wish the outcomes would be more helpful instead of harmful.” Although she embraces being a leader, often the outcomes come with guilt based on her inability to “protect” or “save” her peers from themselves and the negative actions that place them in compromised positions.

In her role as NAACP President, Eady vacillates between doing what is best for the organization versus the individual members. “It’s hard leading your people at times because you want to be gentle, but sometimes the job calls for you to give extremely tough love. This org has a legacy that I want to preserve. It’s complicated!” This dilemma often causes Eady to call home for advice, and her father readily reminds her that, “caring should be your first concern when dealing with people. Don’t allow your fancy education to turn you into a person who is unable to separate business and people.” His advice anchors Eady’s frame for managing people versus issues because she believes dealing with peers in a respectful manner is a foundational piece of being a great leader. “I treat people like I want to be treated. No issue is bigger than the people. Once you start leading solely for the issues, you’ll be lost as a leader.”

Despite mostly referring to how Eady leads in these two organizations that have specific missions and purposes, she sees leadership as all encompassing, yet applicable to

an individual and groups of people:

> Hmm, leadership. Leadership can be anything. It can be you leading by example or it can be like you being in charge of a group of peers, like anything like that. Like anything that gives you an opportunity to showcase skills and like assembling other people and getting people on the same page.

Eady's all encompassing perspective of leadership was learned prior to attending the University of Southern, when she attended predominantly Black, Title 1, Frederick Douglas High School: "my high school lacked resources in a major way so I learned to make sure that even in holding others accountable I couldn't take away their opportunities. It's hard to do here [University of Southern], but I still try."

Eady is a leader with a holistic vision of leadership who is extremely concerned about how her actions affect the lives of those she leads, despite what they have done to warrant negative consequences.

**Barbara Campbell**

Barbara came to Southern State University on a track scholarship, but after injuring herself at a track meet, which forced her to stop competing, she decided to stay connected to athletics by volunteering as a live announcer at track events. Later she was offered an opportunity to serve as the women's team sports color commentator, which allowed her to maintain her scholarship and led to changing her major from public relations to sports media. As far back as middle school Barbara has been involved in team sports, playing basketball, softball and even spending 5 years running track for the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) before attending college. This involvement forced her to learn how to balance athletics with school, which she says would not be a reality without the support of her Grandmother Jessie, who always made certain Barbara did well

academically. “G Jessie stays on me and keeps me focused on the end goal [good grades], she always has. To her, academics is the gateway to athletics so I have to do well in class in order to do well on the field.” In fact, because of family-imposed academic requirements Barbara understands that sports are secondary to excelling in the classroom.

Barbara is an excellent manager of her time. Less than 6 months after arriving at Southern State University she emerged as a bourgeoning leader who sees leadership as “being able to take control of situations and get things done and it’s also a position, uh, where someone elects you to be pretty much in control of your organizations.” Barbara’s definition differentiates between spontaneous and elected leadership behaviors, which she enacts in a variety of ways as Vice-President of the African American Student Association, and President of Southern State University (SSU) Hall Government, a predominantly White organization. When asked about the difference between spontaneous and elected leadership behaviors she elaborated:

> As AFRO AM VP, I was chosen by my peers to lead them in the best direction possible so when I make decisions I feel like I’m held at a greater level of responsibility. Then again, sometimes it’s just about making things happen, which isn’t limited to a certain position. In all of my organizations people take the lead whether they are in a certain post or not.

Concerning the role athletics plays in her academic trajectory, Barbara plans to work for a professional sports team upon graduating and is using her track connections in order to accomplish that goal. As a second-generation college student who attended a suburban, predominantly White high school, Barbara saw athletics as a vehicle to attend college, which she used to her advantage. “In my high school there were few African American female athletes so those of us who participated really stood out to the point where universities came calling. I answered with a ‘yes’!” Barbara’s parents, Cheryl, who

earned an associates' degree, and Bruce, who has a high school diploma, both participated in athletics and understand the importance of being a skilled athlete and scholar. "Both of my parents push me to be smarter instead of a better athlete at the cost of doing well in school." Although her relationship with her parents was instrumental to her development as a scholar and athlete, interacting with athletic personnel also plays a role in her leadership development.

> Coach Felecia White and Athletic Director Mark Brunner have been some of my biggest supporters. Even though I wanted to do track all 4 years, once I was injured coach was like what's next? Until I figured it out, she was constantly having me in administrative meetings, teaching me about budgets and showing me how to manage people. I used all these qualities in my leadership offices especially SSU hall government!

Recognizing that traits of successful leadership are transferrable across organizational types, Barbara adjusts her way of leading based on the followers. "It definitely takes focus because everyone's needs vary. Athletes have different concerns than residents or Black students so I have to pay attention and attempt to make sure needs are being met. Every good leader should." As she approaches her junior year, Barbara looks forward to leading in new, untested organizations and plans to do well in each. She believes: "if I did well in the past, why wouldn't I do well in the future." She is quite the confident leader.

**Shawn Carter**

"I believe leadership is serving most of all. Providing service to yourself, to people around you and whatever you're trying to be a part of and whatever you want to make better," states Shawn who sees servitude as a necessary part of leadership. For Shawn, serving as a leader does not come with a negative connotation because she

associates it with a universal responsibility that all so-called African American leaders should welcome. “I serve because I am called to serve. Again, I stand on the shoulders of giants who paved they way by getting lynched, picking cotton and getting hosed. It is my obligation. It is our obligation.”

Shawn is a first-generation freshman who hit the University of Southern running full steam ahead. Every leadership, social and academic opportunity that was presented, as well as those she found without being prompted, has taught her to be a leader, which is her modus operandi. Prior to coming to the University of Southern, Shawn graduated from a predominantly Black charter high school where the drive to be a leader was instilled in her. “When I was a freshman at Starpoint [high school] I participated in the debate, swimming, newspaper and cooking clubs. I left there able to tackle any challenges or at least that’s how it feels to me.” Shawn’s attitude of a conqueror was transferred to the University of Southern where she is a biochemistry and prenutritional sciences major who is active across campus.

Shawn who serves as President in two organizations, the Freshman Action Team, a subcommittee of the Black Student Association, and the Layton Residence Student Association, works diligently in both organizations to prove her worth, while building trust from her peers. She has taken on a unique strategy:

> As a freshman, I plan on joining as many organizations as will have me in order to get a variety of experiences, build my peer networks early and make sure my voice is at the table when the important decisions are being made. If I play my cards right by the time I’m a senior I will be able to run for class president and being connected is the only way it will happen. Plus, my stepping up as a freshman has impressed people; long as I continue to excel I’ll be fine.

Shawn acquired this attitude while being reared in an equally diverse neighborhood where she interacted with a variety of kids and parents who taught her several lessons.

The most important lesson was "always prove yourself when the moment is right. I learned to ask to lead before being asked to lead. Showing initiative goes a long way because most people are comfortable operating behind the scenes."

This assertive leadership quality allows Shawn to plan her future well in advance. Even though she is only a freshman she is headed to medical school upon graduating. "Ultimately I want to be a surgeon because it will allow me to help others, save lives and earn a living and lifestyle that I want because although I have yet to do so, I would love to travel and see the world!" To reach these goals she is first working on being a better leader at each leadership juncture. Her most fruitful endeavor involves her role on the Freshman Action Team (F.A.T.). "I just love being the F.A.T. President because the position allows me to work with other freshmen, compare our stories, help each other with concerns and just be silly when no one is watching." On the F.A.T. Shawn has learned to organize racially inclusive events, participated in the Big XII Conference on Black Student Government, as a member of the planning committee, and represented the Black Student Association on the University of Southern President's Council.

As a result of her high visibility on campus, Shawn was asked to participate in the Layton Residence Student Association where she is responsible for determining the needs of residents and communicating those to the Assistant Residential Education Coordinator (AREC). Embracing this role, Shawn has distributed resident polls, conducted interviews and held a town hall meeting for residential assistants (RAs) to speak directly to students about their concerns. "I love being involved in a meaningful way! Who comes to college and doesn't get involved? Seriously, who does that?" That Shawn is involved is an understatement and despite her aggressive leadership, social and academic schedules she

maintains a 3.32 GPA, but is disappointed. “I could do better grades wise, which is why I will next semester because if I work harder, I get to play harder, right?”

**Hazel Coleman**

Hazel is a biracial, second-generation college student whose White mother earned a bachelor’s degree, and African American father has an associates’ degree. Hazel, who sees herself as a biracial woman of color, was raised in a suburban, predominantly White neighborhood with her mother, but participated in weekly visitation with her father. Her biracial categorization is at the forefront of Hazel’s identity:

> Being called biracial is where I’m comfortable even though most of the time I know I’m not White enough, but don’t feel Black enough. It’s okay though because I know who I am and because I’m not fully either I’m somewhere in the middle. Actually, I only have a problem with it when other people make it an issue, which seems like almost every day.

Being raised by her mother meant that Hazel attended an affluent predominantly White high school. Prior to high school she did not really understand what it meant to be Black.

> I remember meeting Sheila, my best friend, in the seventh grade. She was my first African American friend, the first girl who schooled me on how being Black looked; before her I just saw myself as mixed without knowing the history of African Americans.

Learning of the historic legacy of Black people caused Hazel to branch outside of her White comfort zone and form friendships with other African Americans while in high school; these bonds made her comfortable enough to continue reaching across racial lines when she arrived at the University of Southern.

> The first thing I did when coming to the University of Southern was join the Black Student Association because it was where all the other African Americans went to learn about campus, be informed about scholarship opportunities, meet future friends and determine who had the same or similar majors. Joining was definitely a good look for me.

After joining the Black Student Association, Hazel found herself needing a different racial reference point that would validate her White feminine identity so she also joined Delta, Delta, Delta Sorority, Inc., a White organization.

> I needed some balance because I wasn't fully accepted in the Black Student Association and because there was no biracial student organization on campus my sorority was the next best thing. Plus, there were other women of color in the sorority so I kind of had the best of both worlds.

Hazel's desire to find a racial in between space not only determined the organizations she joined, but also determined the leadership roles she would take on: Freshman Action Team (F.A.T.) Social Chair, and Program Chair for Delta Delta Delta Sorority, Inc. "When I joined my organizations I wanted to take positions that would allow me to meet people, create inclusive events and have a high interactive leadership role." Hazel frames leadership as a function of humility, yet layered in that it requires multiple facets of leading:

> I define leadership as a person who's confident but not too confident, not cocky. Someone who knows how to delegate, be professional and knows how to lead but also knows how to step back and let someone else take the role if they're clearly better at doing it.

To satisfy her need to find racial connectedness, Hazel also wanted to make sure her leadership mission served a specific purpose: "I want to be the bridge across races, you know, to help each race better understand our differences and similarities. Both perceive the other to be a variety of things, some right, some wrong. I want disrupt those misconceptions." Hazel's leadership purpose is admirable and uniquely connected to solidifying her identity within both White and African American cultural and social spaces.

When Hazel is not involved in leadership roles she is diligently working on her

marketing and international business degree with a minor in Spanish, which she hopes to use working for a nonprofit organization or government overseas. “I am a global citizen who lives in a small world and even though I know people, I don’t know everyone so I have a lot of catching up to do. Plus, I want to give back in a global way!”

**Jo Anne Dent**

Upon graduation Jo Anne will attend graduate school at the University of Michigan in the master’s of social work program. She then plans to pursue a Ph.D. in behavioral analysis to become a juvenile psychologist. Jo Anne’s path to college is similar to other first-generation students who come to campus without familial guidance. When arriving at the University of Southern she attempted to make several connections to find a commonality through African American peers on campus who had similar experiences. Jo Anne attended a variety of cultural events, organizational meetings, and asked African American faculty for advice about navigating the institution. “Black faculty were extremely helpful in providing guidance by offering information about the university like where buildings are located, the teaching styles of certain professors or even where to attend church.”

Jo Anne is President of the Black Student Association and the University of Southern Spanish Club Treasurer. Jo Anne defines leadership as occurring without prompting or requests, as necessary:

> Uh, leadership is stepping up and doing what’s needed without necessarily being asked. Uh, it’s being willing to guide and assist others and, uh, being willing to put yourself in uncomfortable positions in order to better the organization or the people that you feel that you’re leading.

Jo Anne’s leadership definition is based on several experiences at the University of

Southern, but one in particular caused her to discuss the following:

> I believe I was elected as President of the Black Student Association based on an incident at a party one night at the union. It was 2 years ago. There was a fight with Black athletes and White boys over a girl or something. When the campus police came they only wanted to arrest the athletes. I asked, out loud, why aren't you arresting everyone? This is racist! The White boys started it, yet they don't go to jail?

She went on to say, "afterwards, I began getting asked my opinions about a variety of things. I was just a sophomore then; people saw my courage as something they could follow moving forward." Jo Anne, who is now a senior social work and African American studies major, sees moments like the aforementioned as racial flashpoints when Black students find themselves having to defend others as a point of vocalizing their beliefs. "There have been several times when I saw bad things happen because nobody said anything. I'm not built like that so I'll always speak out against wrong no matter what it costs me."

Jo Anne's desire to interrupt injustice emerged when she attended LBJ High School, which is a majority-minority school. "I learned a lot of lessons about injustice in high school. There were so many cliques, and confrontations. To keep things cool I learned how to be in several places, learned the issues and acted to stop the drama." Jo Anne's ability to engage in conflict-resolution tactics with peers is one of her strong points as a leader and has served her well because "if people see you as unbiased they are more likely to listen to what you have to say and follow your lead afterwards." Although Jo Anne is currently a leader in only three organizations, she has grown to understand that involvement is only a part of the puzzle; having allies contributes to her success as a leader. She explains her perspective on the benefit of having allies:

> I've been blessed by having several people who support my visions, successes

> and failures, but keep coming around. Sometimes you can get lost in yourself and need people to bring you back to earth. Plus, you need people to pitch your ideas sometimes and promote your causes. Plus having allies means you need to be an ally for others. It's really a win-win, give-give, take-take process where everyone you need needs you. I've definitely had an easier time because of the company I keep!

Additionally, Jo Anne realizes that the ally relationships she creates can contribute to future opportunities including graduate school letters of recommendation, career hiring, or securing her involvement in nonprofit organizations.

**Mattie Dodd**

Mattie is a second-generation, junior, chemical engineering major who is struggling to be less socially awkward in her interactions with others. As an aspiring engineer Mattie's college experiences are primarily bound by "the science of numbers," which grants her little time to socialize.

> My whole world is about sticking my nose in a book. It's stressful! I get uncomfortable when I'm around a lot of people when it's outside of class because it's hard to identify. I just don't fit in outside of here [engineering].

When socializing, Mattie finds she primarily talks about topics pertaining to engineering and rarely delves into her personal life experiences, which are difficult to share. "I didn't grow up in an affectionate household and sometimes it hinders me from being sensitive to followers when I'm leading. But I'm learning. My sorority sisters are helping me to be better at showing I care." As the Intake Cochair of Gamma Theta Theta, a predominantly White sorority, Mattie has developed a variety of bourgeoning friendships that have helped her adjust to the University of Southern campus.

Although Mattie hesitates to engage people outside of engineering circles, she has a clear understanding of what being a leader means. Mattie expresses her leadership

perspective in a detailed way, primarily seeing leadership in selfless terms:

> Uh, I define leadership as, uh, taking the stance for what's right, really going after it; being active towards what's right. Uh, I really like the quote that talks about a lot more will get done if nobody cared who got the credit. Leadership is not necessarily, just doing things to get credit for getting them done. It's doing things because you know that they need to be done for a greater picture. A leader is the one who looks, the one who looks towards a greater picture to get that picture done even when everybody else may not see it.

Mattie's selfless view of leadership is rooted in her high school experiences. Prior to attending the University of Southern, she graduated from a predominantly White public high school.

> I was teased a lot for being a Nerd, for running the with kids who wore glasses, created complex science projects and sat in the corner of the lunch room. I was in the out group, until I made it my in group. That was when I understood those who are most like me appreciate me most, which is why it's easier to lead them because we have the majority of things in common.

Mattie, who was raised in a suburban predominantly White neighborhood, plans to be hired by a pharmaceutical company where she can be surrounded by people who she deems as "like me." Each of Mattie's parents holds a bachelor's degree, but neither of them is in a science, technology, engineering or math field. Despite this difference Mattie's parents have provided a tremendous amount of support while Mattie has attended University of Southern. "Without my parents school would be impossible. They are my rock! They keep me focused and make sure I have everything I need. They give me advice about how to make the college work for me." In fact, her parents encouraged Mattie to become an engineer when she was a sophomore in high school and paid for her to attend engineering related summer camps for two summers.

Part of what works for Mattie is being the Events Chair for the National Society of Black Engineers University of Southern Chapter because the organization represents

her most comfortable space on campus. Mattie offers the following:

> I love NSBE! I joined as a freshman because I knew coming in I would major in engineering. Although I also joined the Black Student Association too; being there was just natural because it's just African Americans so I'm relaxed there, but NSBE is better because during the meetings you see people you never see in engineering classes. Plus, everybody in the organization gets it [engineering]. It's all Black Nerd love!

Mattie sees NSBE as a scholarly and social outlet where she can be herself without worrying about being scrutinized for her intellect, being African American or her Nerd identity.

**Yssis Hemmings**

When asked how she defined "leadership," Yssis described leadership as occurring internally and exhibited regardless of comfort levels:

> Leadership is defined throughout your character and your ambition. You can't be lazy! You have to be willing to go out and take advantage of opportunities. As a leader you have to be willing to step outside of your comfort zone, teach and lead individuals into the path that you want.

Yssis, who is a second-generation senior, is also a sorority woman who believes in the power of sisterhood. She is vice president of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. an undergraduate organization created for the uplift of young African American women. Yssis has been a member of the sorority for 3 years and wrestles with how her Sorors often position "sisterhood." "Although the University of Southern is becoming more racially diverse, Delta is not and I have a slight problem with it. I mean we promote being inclusive, but rarely practice it with member intake." Yssis, who is a human relations major, with a women's studies minor sees the exclusion of women as problematic especially when enacted by women. "I mean if we aren't welcoming of other women, we

really can't complain when we're excluded."

Prior to attending the University of Southern Yssis graduated from a predominantly White, business magnet high school where some of her organizational activities provided a template for how "sisterhood" should look. When Yssis was a freshman in high school she joined Jack and Jill of America, Inc., an African American societal organization created in 1938 to provide social, cultural and educational opportunities for Black youth. As a member she participated in debutante balls, a variety of community service projects, book drives and self-esteem retreats all designed to build racial and feminine pride in participants. Although Yssis has no female siblings, participating in organizations like Jack and Jill of America, Inc., high school sports teams (basketball and softball) and the church choir instilled a belief that leadership can be synonymous with "sisterhood." "I was taught to look out for the sistas, so I do because I've seen so many sistas looking out."

As somewhat of an activist Yssis is involved on campus in a variety of ways, including participating in the Gateway Introduction to Freshman Program as a teaching assistant where she receives a tuition waiver, which significantly decreases her college expenses. This delights her parents, who are appreciative of her teaching assistantship. Knowing she is succeeding and involved is important. "My parents are grateful for my opportunities in school. They really didn't want me to work, but when I told them about the TA they were impressed, which made me proud." Her parents, both of whom earned bachelor's degrees, raised Yssis in an urban, predominantly Black neighborhood where she was racially socialized to value being a member of the Black community. Yssis offers:

> My hood is the best! What I like about it most is there are a variety of occupations; so many people resources there. Plus, almost all of the people I knew in high school went to college so when I go home on the breaks we get to share all of our stories about our experiences!

Because Yssis has high cultural esteem she wants to pursue a career that allows her to give back to her community, which is emphatically African American. Upon graduating she plans to attend graduate school to earn a Master's of Human Relations degree at the University of Southern, which will enable her to become a licensed professional counselor. "I want to counsel because there aren't many African Americans in the field, especially on college campuses. Black students often have issues like dealing with racism and they need someone to discuss those issues with." Although Yssis is extremely involved in the Black community at the University of Southern, she is also a member of the Pi Phi Honor Society, a predominantly White organization, where she is the Events Chair.

**Chapter summary**

These vignettes illuminate participants' precollegiate leadership experiential background information, describe the micro-organizational contexts surrounding participants' leadership experiences, define how each participant articulates their definition of leadership, explain parental influences on participants' racial and leadership identity development and offer a holistic picture of the study participants. Although the vignettes are not intended to relate the entire narrative of participants, they offer a glimpse into the lives of African American student leaders attending two predominantly White institutions. Next, Chapter V describes the study findings and themes associated

with participants who experienced being leaders within historically Black and predominantly White organizations.

# CHAPTER V

# FINDINGS

This chapter begins by reviewing the research questions that guided the study and the study's purpose. Then each emergent theme is presented in two distinct sections that address the particular organizational context, historically Black and predominantly White. Each theme is defined and presented with three subheadings, which serve to clearly illustrate the meanings of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2007) within the context of being both servant and transformational leaders.

## Research questions

Data were analyzed and coded to answer the following research questions:

1) What motivates African American students to join historically Black and predominantly White organizations?
2) How do African American students experience being leaders in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations?

3) How are African American students' leader efficacies influenced by participating in leadership roles within historically Black and predominantly White organizations?

**Emergent themes**

Four themes emerged from the data analysis: resistant apathy, fluidity of Blackness, positional responsibility and leader efficacy enhancement.

First, participants indicated a disparaging sense of apathy within historically Black and predominantly White organizations, which was evident in members challenging participants' authority and participants' feeling the need to micromanage members.

Secondly, participants acknowledged the fluidity of their Blackness as both beneficial and detrimental in historically Black and predominantly White organizations, which at times enabled and at other times impinged upon their leadership ability.

Third, participants felt great responsibility to lead their constituents and organizations based on their positionality and title, which influenced their personal agendas, emboldened their authority and facilitated their mentoring of members.

Finally, they identified an increase in leadership efficacy with the accomplishing of tasks, being told they led in positive ways, observing program attendance and receiving requests for leadership advice from peers and protégées, all of which reinforced their ability to lead. In order to aid the reader in understanding how the emergent themes are defined, Table 3, is presented, which evolved from participant's narratives.

**Table 3**

**Emergent Themes Defined**

| Thematic Explanations (in brief) |
| --- |
| **Resistant Apathy**: how members who lacked motivation to participate in organizational responsibilities and events challenged participants' leadership authority. Subthemes were *authority challenged*, *micromanaging membership*, and *legacy building*. |
| **Fluidity of Blackness**: how participants' "Blackness" was challenged by members who viewed them as either questionably "Black" or too focused on diversity issues. Subthemes were *Blackness as benefit* and *Blackness as authenticity in question*. |
| **Positional Responsibility**: how participants connected their positional titles to their responsibility to "give back" to their communities and combat Black stereotypes. Subthemes were *positionality as racialized*, *personal agenda development*, and *mentoring opportunities*. |
| **Leader Efficacy Enhancement**: how participants' efficacy as a leader increased through accomplishing tasks, being told they were leaders, and programming attendance. Subthemes were *accomplishing task*, *peer confirmation*, and *program attendance*. |

**Resistant apathy**

Nearly every participant talked about challenges to their authority, in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations, which stemmed from having to micromanage members' and officers' task fulfillment and motivation due to a lack of participation. These interactions with members provided participants with opportunities to educate through constructive criticism and encourage engagement within the university community. They also allowed for the building of sociocultural and political awareness to further discuss and enact an African American student agenda. Finally, participants served as models for building organizational legacies, based on the ways they led. Each of these facets of resistant apathy is discussed in detail below.

Authority challenged

Authority challenged is defined as disruptive occurrences experienced by participants that impeded their ability to lead members in a proactive manner to positively advance the organizations in which they led. In historically Black organizations participants' primary challenges stemmed from attempting to become more inclusive, while hypersurveillance impeded their ability to move agendas forward in predominantly White organizations.

*Historically Black organizations*

Participants found their authority, at times, usurped by organizational members, which proved to be a primary source of leadership trepidation. Malcolm expressed his frustration with being compared to previous organization presidents who were eager to

acquiesce to members' agendas: "It seems like each time I have ideas, I hear about the last president. My goal is to grow the organization, not do the same programs. This is problematic because sometimes it feels like it's their way or nothing." In Malcolm's numerous efforts to take the organization in a new direction, he was met with resistance, which added to his stress as a leader: "Although I love my people, sometimes I hate the way they act because it makes it difficult for me to participate! This is just one aspect of my life and when it's not right, I'm worse off." Even though reinventing their organizations, by attempting to offer new ways of doing things, sometimes resulted in leadership angst, participants also dealt with negative feedback when attempting to expand the organizational constituency as it pertained to race.

Members in historically Black organizations readily challenged participants' ideas about restructuring organizational agendas, especially when they included broadening the membership base and becoming all-inclusive. Yssis spoke to this point:

> Although I realize our sorority was created for the cultural, academic and community support of African Americans that does not mean it was done to the exclusion of other racial groups. Pro-Black is not anti-White. Reaching across the line [race] can expose us to something new, but the sisters ain't having it!

Specifically, some participants wrestled with justifying the need for their organizations to become more inclusive, as stated by Barack: "…certainly, Alpha was created to uplift Black people, but if people who aren't Black are onboard with doing so why shouldn't we allow them to help push our agenda forward? Doing so doesn't make us less Black!"

Additionally, the majority of participants discussed organizational members' resistance around spending discretionary funding. To illustrate, student organizations at the University of Southern are allowed to request line item funding for operational and programming purposes including speaker honorariums and conference attendee stipends;

however, discretionary funds can be requested and utilized as organizations see fit. Jo Anne addressed this issue: “Although it’s not my budget, as president, I should have the latitude to determine how it is allocated, especially after all programming is accounted for. ” Doris added: “It’s a sticky issue at times, especially during the end of the year when we are trying to get to $0. Everyone has an opinion about how we should spend what’s left so that’s usually when arguments happen.” Concerning budgetary issues, constituent disagreements were often points of contention and organizational paralysis. According to Eady, “when it comes to money, you can throw majority rules right out the window because as president I’ll be blamed or celebrated based on how efficient we operate as an organization,” which was a shared sentiment among organization presidents and treasurers.

Although participants for the most part experienced support, when their leadership goals were incongruent with those of members their ability to lead was hampered by resistance to their vision, agendas and efforts in historically Black organizations. Although this resistance was often interpreted as nonnefarious, it served to not only truncate the power of participants, but also impeded their ability to accomplish agendas in what they deemed a “timely manner” as stated by Hazel.

*Predominantly White organizations*

In predominantly White organizations participants felt that hypersurveillance impeded their ability to move their agendas forward, which contributed to prolonging the leadership process. Shawn stated:

> I feel like I’m scrutinized more than my White peers who lead. I’m asked 1,000 questions every time I present ideas, while others’ ideas are readily accepted

> without complaint or contest. It's frustrating because we only have 2 semesters to make change so the quicker we reach consensus the better.

Martin concurred with Shawn by stating:

> As one of few African Americans, at times everyone is looking to me to respond to some things, like issues of race, and I don't always feel like it. When I don't respond I think people see me as disinterested, and that hurts my image as a leader, which makes it harder for me to get what I want.

Additionally, in predominantly White organizations participants experienced a sense of needing to be "twice as informed in order to be considered equally competent," which was interpreted as a lack of respect and possible low expectations due to not being White. Hazel stated: "I feel like when I offer ideas for events, I have to know each and every thing about it in order for the girls to be completely on board while others make mere suggestions and everyone is ready to volunteer to help." Ruby stated: "Before I mention anything about what's best for our residence hall, I make sure I know all the rules, regulations and ways we can benefit from my suggestions. I have to be super informed to be heard!" This notion of needing to be well informed when addressing constituents in predominantly White organizations was echoed by other participants who perceived it as necessary to validate their leadership roles as African Americans who are possibly seen as less informed. Additionally, some participants believed the more they were seen as less informed, the less willing organization members and officers were to follower their leadership.

Despite organizational context, participants also perceived that peers frequently missed important meetings and relinquished responsibilities, during critical times, as subtle forms of resistance. Barbara felt "sometimes not participating is about the leader, not the organization," which is why it was important for participants to identify

organizational supports before, during and after presenting their leadership agendas.

## Micromanaging membership

Micromanaging membership involves leaders placing members under hypersurveillance in an effort to ensure the completion of their assigned tasks. This includes repeatedly reminding them of their organizational responsibilities and commitment, which occurred in historically Black and predominantly White organizations. This theme is illustrated by participants' narratives, which situate them as making certain followers fulfilled membership obligations by reinforcing a sense of organizational urgency.

### *Historically Black organizations*

Barbara mentioned the importance of encouraging organization members to stay focused and on task as part of her leadership responsibilities, because "if we don't provide for our [Black] students, who will?" Malcolm offered a similar sentiment about providing cultural support for African American students, as well as the value of using organizations to do so:

> AFRO AM serves as the umbrella organization to all other Black orgs on campus so it is important for us to lead the way when it comes to handling business. We are the "Black" in the student union. We kind of introduce new students to the Black experience on campus, which is why I stay on my cabinet about getting things done on time; not CP [pejorative casting colored people as habitually late] time!

In part, achieving goals in a timely manner, as well as providing efficient examples of leadership, was a common concern for each participant, but for different reasons. Eady spoke to a personal point by offering the following: "We have to lead by example and

that requires us to continually be willing to work, even after hours to accomplish our goals. Leading isn't easy! It costs to be the boss so I keep them [Black students] on their toes." Ruby added an organizational perspective by stating "time is always of the essence! There are so many organization deadlines so we can't slack, doing so might cost us opportunities, funding or interested members." For participants like Eady and Ruby, ensuring that both personal and organizational tasks were accomplished spoke to a desire to make certain "the Black brand is solid across campus, because everyone is watching," as stated by Yssis.

Although participants saw encouragement as motivational to the accomplishment of organization tasks, it was also crucial to the fulfillment of historically Black organizations' goals. To demonstrate, Mattie stated, "our main goal is to educate Black engineers about the industry and provide a place to be 'Black' without the extra. I support members being themselves, but also knowing how to be the best engineer matters." Similarly, Hazel mentioned, "I encourage everybody, but I'm aware that if my Black organization fails we all look bad; in the White organization, not so much." Hazel's perspective was an overarching commonality shared by participants who saw their leadership image racially intertwined with that of the organization, peers, members and officers. Martin best summed it up by saying "our organizations [Black] are a reflection of us, so when I shine, we shine and when we shine our organizations look great!"

This individual-connected-to-group perspective existed primarily because participants were mindful of their cultural connectedness to African American peers, which at times overrode their personal aspirations. According to Jo Anne, "there are several times when I have a vision that is not the same as the members' and because I'm

here to serve, I follow their vision at times. All good leaders should be able to follow." Doris offered a similar perspective stating "part of being a leader is balancing your desires with that of the people so the best thing I can do is step back sometimes and be their footstool." Many participants echoed this sentiment, which reinforced their rationale for purposefully leading from a people-centered, rather than selfish perspective in historically Black organizations.

*Predominantly White organizations*

While leading in predominantly White organizations participants also micro-managed followers to preserve organizational efficiency; however, doing so was not influenced by a racial motivation to make White peers look good like it was for African Americans. To illustrate the seriousness of needing to micromanage organization members, Martin acknowledged that the success of his leadership hinges on being able to double, even triple check peers' work:

> Our camp is responsible for socializing in-coming freshmen to the University of Southern so we basically have no margin for error. Our goals for the camp need to unfold exactly as planned so people can't drop the ball; plus, they know I'm standing over their shoulders making certain they don't fail. I run a tight ship!

This notion of running a tight ship speaks to making certain his organization functions properly. Yssis echoed similar concerns stating, "sometimes there's so much going on people need to be reminded. Plus, because we are in a honor society sometimes egos are involved so you have to tell people about the prestige and that work is a part of the benefit!" These concerns deal with Yssis' ability to not only manage the organization, but also to navigate personalities therein, which enhances her ability to lead because "people are the center of this organization so if I have good rapports, I'll have a good handle on

the organization. Doing so makes me a better leader."

Participants, regardless of organizational context, attempted to empower members to make independent decisions, but were mindful that the organization's success is directly attached to their ability to lead their peers. For example, Shawn explained the connection between her leadership and organization members:

> Mama used to read me this story about the Pied Piper being able to make children follow his lead by playing soothing music. I try to make people follow me by leading smoothly, in a way that makes everyone comfortable. No matter how much I accomplish, people's being willing to follow me says how successful my leadership is. Part of making people comfortable is by giving them responsibility, which shows I believe in them. The best way to do that is letting them make decisions for the organization, which ties the organization's success to their own.

All participants perceived their micromanagement of members' tasks as valued, though not always welcomed. Ultimately, participants granted latitude for choices made by members, which they believed was essential to leading. "I learned to be a leader by paying attention to how I failed; what not to do. When I help people to succeed by failing they'll always remember what worked best" Barack stated. Martin interjected a similar perspective: "I own my decisions and try to help people own theirs. The best way to do so is to give them the power to be involved and see what happens."

Although empowering followers was a commonality shared across participants, as they led in predominantly White organizations they were mindful to do so in an organization-centered manner where their individual perspectives were often front and center. "I do want everyone to have a voice, but in this [White] organization sharing power can be seen as a leadership weakness, which is why I mostly set an agenda and roll with it" said Barbara. Malcolm added, "I believe at times people test my leadership so the less opportunities they have, by offering their opinions, the better. That's why I make

sure the organizational agenda comes first, sometimes over the desires of individual people." This line of reasoning was more about being a leader who follows a majority rules philosophy than attempting to acquiesce to each individual member of the organization because "politicking is essential to being a good leader, which means as long as I get the majority on board, I'm successful" stated Martin.

In short, seeking individual buy-in in order to accomplish organizational goals was important to participants, but not essential if a majority of members or officers concurred with participants' leadership agendas. Instituting leadership tactics like achieving buy-in was a valuable strategy because it allowed participants to gain followers, who would support them and encourage new members to do the same, which granted participants influence that could be used to shape their legacies as leaders. Having a desire to create, develop and shape leadership legacies was a common desire shared across participants.

### Legacy building

Legacy building is defined as purposeful strategic efforts taken by participants to preserve the reputation of their organizations, which was achieved by teaching protégés how to lead by leading in an exemplary manner that set the benchmark for how Black leaders enact leadership. In historically Black organizations participants attempted to create legacies of African American leadership excellence as a template toward building future Black leaders. In predominantly White organizations legacies were primarily built to set a positive precedent that combatted perceived stereotypes about Black student leaders.

*Historically Black organizations*

Regardless of organizational context, participants were aware of their leadership legacies, but for distinctly different reasons that were directly related to race and being African American. Ruby stated: "The people coming behind us need to be aware of the struggles we weathered, how we did it and what was required. They need to know where to go on campus for certain things and who supports our organizations." Ruby's statement describes her commitment to ensuring the success of upcoming African American student leaders in historically Black organizations. Barack added: "Being a leader means showing younger brothers how to lead, which ties into how to handle business. I'm responsible for doing so, for making sure the reputation of Alpha is well preserved." This perspective of preparing future African American leaders to lead in the Black campus community was echoed by all participants, regardless of their leadership role in historically Black organizations.

Furthermore, to develop a pipeline of African American leaders to take their places in leadership roles, participants utilized educational conferences as central sources for the leadership developmental process. Mattie remarked:

> If you have a leadership position on this campus, in a Black organization, you either attended or will attend the Big XII Conference on Black Student Government. It is the place to be if you want to be a leader!

Doris expounded on the value of attending conferences that provided professional exposure and leadership development:

> As an engineer major I attend our regional conference every year, but I make sure I'm at the Big XII Conference on Black Student Government because it covers a variety of issues Black students face. Plus, you get to meet and talk to other Black leaders from other campuses about anything. Best of all you get to take your leadership team, which will give them an opportunity to see how it's [leadership] done outside of the Southern State University bubble.

Leading by example and attending regional and national educational conferences were two primary ways of preserving organizational reputation, as well as providing teaching moments for peers in leadership best practices. Additionally, attending the Big XII Conference on Black Student Government, and understanding the value of doing so, is part of the Black leadership culture on both the Southern State University and University of Southern campuses. In part, this culture of leadership stems from attending the annual 35 year-old conference, which was created by Black students within the Big VIII, in 1977 in response to hostile campus climates. Currently, the conference rotates to each campus within the Big XII, of which Southern State University and the University of Southern are members.

*Predominantly White organizations*

Doris spoke to the importance of having a positive legacy: "As an African American female, I have to make sure I do well. If I don't it may close the door on the next Black woman in these [White] spaces. I do well, opportunities will come out of my work." This perspective spoke to how African American students saw themselves as viewed in monolithic terms by White members and officers. The way others viewed them was either strengthened or harmed by their leadership performance. Barbara described this: "I have to be excellent, can't have an off day; if so, their [Whites'] doubt builds." This type of awareness caused each participant to work diligently toward ensuring none of their efforts tarnished their track record as leaders in the event that future opportunities were dependent on past leadership performance.

> Like my pops said, all I have is my good name, which is also true of being a known leader on campus. My work speaks for itself, so I need to make sure my

actions allow my work to speak good of my abilities. (Ruby)

Wanting to be remembered as a quality leader was a belief expressed by every participant, especially as it pertained to leading in predominantly White organizations. Participants believed that being anything less than exemplary was not an option. Malcolm clarified this by stating "the best way to show how African American students lead is by leading in a way where your abilities are rarely questioned because the majority of the time you make great decisions. When you do, your name is good!" Wanting to have a "good" name as a leader was central to legacy building because doing so either built on previous examples of Black leadership excellence, within a historically Black context or defied possible stereotypes within predominantly White organizations. Additionally, wanting to "be good" was an indicator of participants viewing their leadership in present and futuristic terms that contributed to the greater "good" of African American students yet to come. This desire to leave a good legacy for African American students, by "being good," was in direct response to participants seeing Blackness as good and wanting to preserve that goodness in perpetuity. Moreover, although participants viewed "Blackness" in terms of goodness, at times they also experienced "Blackness" as having an adverse affect on their leadership.

**Fluidity of blackness**

Participants discussed the varied degrees to which being African American, which for them was synonymous with their levels of "Blackness," was perceived by organization members based on the following two notions: 1) utilizing race as a benefit; or 2) repeated questioning of their loyalty to race. Within both historically Black and

predominantly White organization contexts participants acknowledged that they perceived that their "Blackness," when coupled with their leadership roles, influenced how they were seen, and followed as leaders.

## Blackness as benefit

Participants utilized being "Black" as a way to experience connectedness with organizational members based on their wealth of cultural knowledge, which they used to inform their organizations about issues pertaining to race. In historically Black organizations participants were able to express themselves racially and were culturally validated, while in predominantly White organizations they were viewed as valuable for their perspectives on inclusion and diversity.

### *Historically Black organizations*

Each participant spoke about the racial "freedom" they experienced when leading in historically Black organizations, which was based on cultural comfort, commonality and validation. Barack stated: "It is definitely easier to lead when surrounded with my people." Doris added: "Being around us is just better because I'm accepted as, not needing to explain why something is funny, why my hair is a certain way or why I used a word. I breathe easier here." Hazel believed historically Black organizational members see her as credible when she explained how she experiences racism on campus because she, too, is African American. Mattie added:

> Attending an institution where there are few of us is at times scary because you have to search for understanding. We have a community here, so when we address our issues no one ever questions whether we are lying, biased or exaggerating because Black people always play the race card when we don't get

> our way. We're believed here. That matters.

The significance of sharing cultural commonality is not to be understated; in fact, for the majority of participants, it was the primary reason they joined historically Black organizations. As Martin stated, "we can make mistakes here that won't be charged to the race." Barack added:

> My fraternity, which was created for Black men, is central to my survival at SSU because it's a safe haven against having to deal with racism or discrimination. In Alpha we address and discuss the real talk issues; can't really do that in the White organizations without being labeled a troublemaker or reverse-racist. That's why I joined Alpha! Plus, through Alpha I get to give back to the Black community, which is what I'm supposed to; can't do that in the White organizations either!

Barack's perspective reflected a need to join historically Black organizations in order to be, in part, unapologetically Black by speaking to African American issues, and enacting community service within Black communities; both of which were important to each of the participants. However, these needs were exclusive to historically Black organizations as a function of racial self-fulfillment and were not mentioned in relation to predominantly White organizations.

*Predominantly White organizations*

In contrast, in predominantly White organizations participants felt that being African American was in part why they were allowed to lead; they were labeled as the organization's source on diversity issues, as well as inclusion personified. According to Malcolm:

> Being one of few African Americans is good because people listen to my perspectives about a variety of topics; especially about social justice. They value me because I'm different, because having me as an African American member adds to the organization.

Additionally, participants were aware of dispelling African American stereotypes in predominantly White organizations through their actions including "speaking scholarly" and dressing "professional" when addressing White constituencies. To this point, Shawn added:

> Whenever I'm meeting in LRSA, I pull my locs back and make sure I present myself as all about business, you know, nicely dressed because in that organization it's only about business. Being "Black" don't necessarily translate the same way across organizations.

Although participants felt they represented inclusion personified in predominantly White organizations, their ability to utilize this belief, in the form of Blackness, varied. While Eady saw her Blackness as "good to have because I represent the voice of Black women who aren't a part of this [White] organization," Hazel felt "being Black in my [White] sorority means I represent diversity, plus it allows me to recruit other women of color who might not join if we weren't represented." Based on perceptions similar to these, participants saw their Blackness as central to the reasons they were in part received or rejected as leaders in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations, which ultimately influenced how they engaged each organization.

### Blackness as authenticity in question

Blackness as authenticity in question relates to the way participants experienced trepidation when their racial loyalties were doubted in historically Black organizations, and feeling like it was assumed their leadership perspectives came primarily from a racialized rather than organizational perspective in predominantly White organizations.

*Historically Black organizations*

Each participant discussed times when they felt their African American group loyalty or alignment with social justice issues was questioned based on the assumption that they were less African American because they led in a variety of organizations; not just those that are historically Black. Martin described his frustration with this:

> It is like Black people want to own you, own your effort. The problem is some Black people only want to work to help Black people and although nothing is wrong with that the world is not Black so I try to lead throughout campus. Unfortunately, some people see that as me not being true to the cause, like I should only lead us. That is frustrating!

Mattie concurred: "Because I'm in a White sorority, my Blackness is definitely up for discussion, no matter how well I lead in NSBE someone is always going to ask 'is she really Black, Black?'" Barack added his perspective: "Because I'm well connected in White organizations it's expected that I got the hook to resources that I should be getting for Black students and although that's true, if I don't doesn't mean I'm less Black." To this point, participants perceived their desire and ability to lead in predominantly White organizations as problematic at times because it came with the burden of being seen as less "down for the Black cause" or as an Uncle Tom within the on-campus African American student community.

*Predominantly White organizations*

Contrarily, African American participants had to deal with being perceived as having racialized agendas when leading in predominantly White organizations. In fact, even when organizational inclusion was desired, for a myriad of reasons, participants experienced these desires as associated solely with race. Mattie stated: "Although I would

like to see our sorority more diverse, I believe they see me as the diversity person even when it isn't the topic. We could be talking about events and I get asked about who I'm inviting." Ruby agreed: "Race is always mentioned and directed to me regardless of the topic like they expect me to bring it up, which gets on my nerves! It's like they see me as too Black." Participants found that these types of interactions reinforced their ability to defend Blackness, which prepared them for discussions pertaining to race. Because White members assumed that participants prioritized race above all else, in responding to this falsity participants learned to develop arguments supporting the need for diversity. Doris offered the following:

> Most times discussions are about the business of the organization, but sometimes it's like they're waiting for me to bring race into the discussion, which keeps my being Black on my mind. Like last week we were discussing strategies for mentoring students and I received all the Black mentees like they assumed I only wanted to mentor Black students. Although I don't have a problem with mentoring Black students, because I do it anyway, I do have a problem with them defaulting to lining up my mentorship with just Black students.

In part, some participants perceived their White peers as expecting them to perform Blackness at all times. Martin stated "In the honor society we have several committees and of course, I'm on the program diversity and outreach committees where even though one is about inclusion, the other isn't. Regardless, I've been told to recruit students of color." Although participants appreciated having their race acknowledged, being labeled as social justice personified was problematic. In fact, at times it precluded participants from functioning as leaders in their elected or appointed positions due to peer expectations that they should operate in a racialized capacity first and foremost. Eady spoke to why these expectations were frustrating: "On the integrity counsel I've been frequently asked to speak on behalf of Black students due to my being African American.

As peer jurors we're supposed to speak to the issue, not the students, which is frustrating!" Concerns like these were discussed by participants as challenges to performing their leadership roles, because they also had to perform Blackness whether their positions concerned race or not. Although learning this ability was difficult at times, it contributed to participants' positional awareness and responsibilities in racial, as well as political, terms.

**Positional responsibility**

Participants connected their responsibility to lead members to their positionality and title within each organization. Positionality was defined as an expectation to "give back" in historically Black organizations, and as a tool to eliminate stereotypes of African Americans in predominantly White organizations. Participants' titles, and the perceived power therein, bolstered their authority and determined their personal agendas while also facilitating the mentoring of organizational members.

Positionality as racialized

Positionality as racialized relates to the ways participants viewed their positions within organizations as directly attached to being African American, which they believed heightened their responsibility to guide their race in a positive, enriching way that was seen as "giving back" (Hazel) in historically Black organizations. In predominantly White organizations participants utilized their positions and titles to strengthen their professional networks in hopes of brokering a career opportunity upon graduating.

*Historically Black organizations*

Belonging to historically Black organizations represented participants' need to meet personal racial obligations while finding a sense of cultural connectedness when leading. Mattie stated, "my Grammy always told me I was standing on the shoulders of giants and doing so meant at every opportunity I should give back to my community because they gave to me. I can do that in NSBE." Leadership positions in historically Black organizations allowed participants to be racially grounded and give back to African American people, who were often affectionately referred to as "the community." According to Martin, "crafting leadership skills here is beneficial because I get to give back to my community while learning how to lead and watch other leaders." Hazel agreed: "Being biracial, it is important to be in this space because I'm accepted as a leader despite being not fully Black. Plus, I get to educate my Black peers about my White side. Kind of advocate for both." Leading in historically Black organizations provided a sense of racial pride that allowed participants to relish their leadership roles because these organizations enabled them to "show up and show out for the community!" Barack added:

> Being an Alpha means several things, but it especially means being called to serve the Black community. As Chaplain, I get to pray for the souls of our members and for the progression of African American people, as well as other races of people too. Alpha is a community service organization so I knew by joining I would be expected to help my community!

Taking care of and giving back to the African American community through leadership positions in historically Black organizations was reiterated by participants and ultimately served as a therapeutic opportunity to help and be racially validated. This was valued because "being in the hood is where I'm most comfortable. You know, just us,

where it feels like a beauty shop everywhere. Black women just relatable, no one is afraid because I'm there and appreciative that I came" (Ruby).

*Predominantly White organizations*

Belonging to predominantly White organizations represented participants' desire to develop networks and connections in preparation for entering the workforce after graduation. Barack stated, "Being a member of AKP is definitely a benefit because all of the members are business majors. We're always talking about business opportunities or internships; really, it just sets me up for after I graduate." In fact, participants who joined predominantly White organizations were keenly aware of the benefits associated with the notion of "it's not what you know, it's who you know" (Eady). Participants were also aware that being one of few African Americans in predominantly White organizations allowed them to combat stereotypes. Mattie stated, "As one of few minorities in my sorority, I focus on not coming off as the angry Black woman because I know these sisterly bonds last forever and could determine how I get put on [hired] upon leaving." Malcolm added:

> One thing I've always done is avoided operating on CPT [colored people time] because it sets the tone of your leadership. I start meetings on time. I end meetings early if possible. Don't want to be seen as on of those "late" officers. Like my pops says, "if you're early, you're on time, if you're on time you're late!"

These racialized perceptions served to guide participants' purposeful behaviors when interacting with members of both organizations because, as communicated by Barack, "you're always being watched regardless, which means you can't have a bad day and always need to have on your game face!" As Hazel noted, "my positions in each

organization are different because of how I see myself and how I'm perceived. Being biracial means adjusting to F.A.T. [freshman action team] culturally, while in my sorority it's about adjusting to future contacts." In fact, "having on your game face" (Barack) meant being prepared to lead at any given time regardless of location, who is present or whether the setting calls for a leader. Additionally, leadership positions occupied by participants were either elected or appointed, and they perceived those roles as having greater responsibility than other positions like being a volunteer, as mentioned by Shawn:

> I'm the only Black residence student association president in my quad so I have a lot at stake. I mean, I've heard some people say Layton is the ghetto, probably because I'm over it, not because it's run down. I took this position because I knew I could get more accomplished as the leader than if I was just floor social chair or something else. Being president carries weight and I'm willing to carry it.

This realization further influenced a need to "give back," utilize leadership opportunities for career gain upon graduating and to serve as a way to eliminate stereotypes of African Americans. Essentially, positionality in historically Black and predominantly White organizations was based on the title, which led participants to be more mindful of their leadership practices.

### Personal agenda development

Personal agenda development relates to participants' motivations for joining organizations, which influenced how they choose to lead. Specifically, whether they joined organizations for cultural connectedness in historically Black organizations or professional development in predominantly White organizations, the leadership decisions directly reflected their pursuit of personal and professional fulfillment.

*Historically Black organizations*

Each participant felt a responsibility to lead thoughtfully and carefully in part because "like they said in the Spiderman movie, with great power comes great responsibility" (Malcolm). In fact, participants perceived certain titles as validation of their leadership ability, but realized these abilities needed to be actualized. Jo Anne added the following:

> Last year I served on a few committees because I needed to take extra classes to make sure I graduated on time, so my work was limited. I came and went as I pleased and participated only when it fit into my schedule. Being elected as President of the BSU, means they [peers] believe in me so I have to give it 100% in order to meet their expectations. You know, guide the organization in the right direction and make sure my mistakes are limited because now it's more than just about me or my schedule. Now I can't be casual.

This perspective is indicative of participants' belief that their organizational role was at the forefront of their thoughts and partly guided how they led. Yssis spoke of the consequences involved when holding specific leadership positions in her organization, "Although being second in command has many rewards, you definitely get blamed for failures. Then again, Sorors trust me enough to follow my vision, but when I was just a dues paying member, not so much." Additionally, in feeling culturally responsible for constituents, participants' personal agendas often aligned with those of the organization, which was frequently political and focused on ensuring that African American students can access all the resources offered by their institutions. Ruby spoke to this point:

> In my position I make certain we [African Americans] aren't wasteful with our funding, you know, because some people believe we are irresponsible and excessive in everything we do because of Hip Hop images and stuff. So even when we can splurge, I make sure we reel it in and leave the next administration in the black.

Barbara added, "It is important for me to make sure my organization allows Black

students at Southern State University to have a voice because we ain't always invited to the table as individuals so AFRO AM gets us heard!" Yssis concurred:

> Delta is the premiere Black sorority on campus so even though we represent each other, we represent other Black women who don't have this outlet to express themselves. Combating the suffrage of Black women is a major focus for Delta so we program and educate around that point to encourage Black women to use their voices in productive ways. I'm committed to Delta. I'm committed to Black women. I'm committed to lead whether anyone else wants to or not!

Other participants with perspectives similar to Barbara and Yssis used their historically Black organizations to amplify the collective perspectives of African American students that otherwise go unheard.

*Predominantly White organizations*

Achieving personal agendas within predominantly White organizations revolved around being prepared professionally. Jo Anne offered, "As treasurer, there is a pressure of accountability because you're managing peoples' dues and organization budget so they expect you to do it well, but they also listen to my financial recommendations because I'm treasurer." This perspective was shared by Barbara, pertaining to positional skill expectations based on previous performance:

> I've been in this position 2 straight years now so I know what I'm talking about concerning what residents need. Plus, people have seen me lead, watched me get TVs for our floor, bring good speakers and stuff like that, so when I speak they listen.

Barack also found that having held a previous position in the same organization carried value: "People already trusted me because they've seen me lead in Alpha before, but in a different role. Since I paid dues last in Alpha, and people saw how I led, they were more likely to follow me now as social chair." Perceived leadership ability, as attached to

organizational position or role, was also experienced by Shawn who stated, "We operate under Roberts' Rule of Order so I have the authority to control the pace and direction of the meeting in ways general members can't. Plus, as president I know about housing issues; it's my job to know." To this point, participants often mentioned how having previously led in organizations not only bolstered followers' perceptions of them as competent leaders in the next role, but also served as one of the reasons members were willing to follow them in their current leadership positions. To illustrate, Barbara offered:

> I've lived in the same residence hall for the last 4 years. Two years ago I was selected to be over programming for our floor. Last year, I was floor treasurer. In both of these positions I worked with people in RHA and our hall, which built up my rep as a leader so when I ran for President of the SSU Hall Government it was a wrap because I wasn't new to the organization. So I think people elected me because they were familiar with my leadership.

As leaders who occupied a variety of positions in each organization, participants were also aware of having to navigate positional politics, which in part aided their ability to lead when blatantly challenged by organization members. These politics were sometimes experienced as being more networked than others, having greater experience in their current leadership roles or knowing when to bargain with other leaders in order to get their agendas expedited. Doris described dealing with organizational politics stating, "Sometimes leadership is dirty so you need to know how to avoid it and that is best done by creating alliances that benefit you and those you represent. Sometimes I win, then I lose, but politics don't stop!" Being mindful of fulfilling their personal agendas often translated into participants utilizing organizations to make constituents aware of their leadership abilities, which helped them navigate the politics involved. A function of this was the availability of opportunities to mentor members about leadership, which included showing them how to lead.

Mentoring opportunities

Mentoring opportunities are defined as beneficial interactions participants had with peers, faculty, administrators and advisors, within both organizational contexts, that provided opportunities to learn about the functions of leadership. Interactions included cyclical moments when participants were educated about leading and then educated members about leading based on personal and anecdotal experiences.

*Historically Black organizations*

Participants' leadership positions facilitated opportunities to mentor organizational members and prepare the next group of leaders. Eady stated, "The process of becoming a leader in the NAACP is like stair stepping because you can't come in your first year and be president, which means you have to be mentored first like I was before taking over." Yssis added, "If you ain't paid your dues, you can forget having an important position within Delta. My position allows me to show sisters the ropes before they step forward. This way they know what they're getting into first." Although participants mentioned using their positions to educate other members, not all of them referred to this as formal mentoring, but they were aware of the importance of mentoring.

Receiving support and mentoring from organizational advisors was often the catalyst for learning how to be an effective mentor. Hazel offered the following:

> The best part about being a leader is leading by example. I get to help other freshmen learn how to become good leaders while I'm learning. Our advisor is the best mentor! She's great at critiquing me as a leader, which helps me give others good feedback.

Eady had a similar perspective: "Brandon is our advisor. He was president last year, graduated and works here now. He helps me by giving pointers about how to handle

egos, develop other leaders and still get our goals accomplished." These types of advisor interactions, which were a template for participants' mentoring of organization members, were also experienced in predominantly White organizations. Additionally, some participants discussed how formal mentoring relationships with faculty contributed to their preparation as organizational leaders. "My relationship with Dr. Carr is instrumental to my leadership development because he's an engineer so he gives me insight about how he led in NSBE as an undergrad, which is a helpful blueprint," stated Mattie. Barack added:

> Dr. Washington helps me with a variety of things, but he's especially concerned about how I should carry myself as a Black male. For him, image is everything so it's easy for me to tell other brothers about the importance of maintaining their leadership images because I'm getting schooled on the same thing!

Participants saw mentoring as cyclical, in that the ways they were mentored by organizational advisors, faculty and peers were central to their mentoring of newer members, regardless of whether the mentoring advice concerned race.

*Predominantly White organizations*

Participants also found that mentor relationships with advisors, faculty and peers were beneficial within predominantly White spaces: "Having competent advisors really works! They teach you the ropes, introduce you to key people and expect you to do the same; you know, pay it forward. It's easy to do so when you've seen it done correctly" (Martin). Providing a slightly different take on having an advisor, Barack stated:

> Some advisors mentor in reverse by showing you how not to lead. This organization is about prestige, so our advisor was too standoffish, always wanting you to prove yourself before offering to help. Working with him taught me to help people wherever they are, when they need it without making them earn my help!

These interactions proved instrumental in providing participants with know-how concerning mentoring best practices, which they used to improve their electoral boards and general members. To illustrate, Shawn offered the following:

> In housing we work closely with advisors because there are specific ways of doing housing work like scheduling, being on call, programming for floor residents and even dealing with student disciplinary issues. My advisor, who is the AREC, keeps me on point so I've really learned about how to run my residence, interact with RAs and even talk to parents sometimes.

Interacting with advisors, faculty and peers provided opportunities for participants to be mentored whether in informal or formal capacities, all of which aided participants in mentoring organizational members.

**Leader efficacy enhancement**

Lastly, all participants, regardless of organizational context, experienced leader efficacy enhancement when leading. Participants found that the following reinforcements of their leadership abilities increased their sense of efficacy as a leader: accomplishing tasks, being told they led in positive ways, programming attendance and requests for leadership advice from peers and protégées.

Accomplishing tasks

Accomplishing tasks was defined by participants as completing various acts that are central to advancing the organizations in which they led or uplifting the people their organizations served, including members. In historically Black organizations achieving task completion was meant a desire to uplift the "Black" race, while in predominantly White organizations accomplishing tasks was solely about confirming an ability to lead.

*Historically Black organizations*

Participants viewed the fulfillment of their organizational agendas as essential to their leadership ability. Barack supported this perspective: "I am kind of responsible for the souls of the brotherhood, so I can't have them just acting any old kind of way. I have to guide them. If I fail to do so, the organization is in jeopardy." Yssis added, "My sorority is about the uplift of women and outreach to Black women. As VP, planning events like Delta Gems builds the esteem of Black girls and when that happens I'm fulfilled because we are doing our job." Additionally, participants' desire to lead "their" people to do something culturally important increased with the accomplishment of political tasks like registering organizational members to vote. "My most successful event was registering incoming Black Freshman to vote! I got the word out, organized the transportation and made sure people did it. Voting is a right and I got people signed up. I did that!" stated Shawn. Eady added:

> As the college NAACP we've really been focusing on issues like racial profiling to prevent our students from having a Travon Martin moment. If we can raise campus awareness about issues that are important to our community then I've done my job as a leader!

Experiencing personal fulfillment by doing one's job was a sentiment shared by each participant, especially the 5 who held the role of president within their organizations. "Knowing we made Black students' lives better, makes it all worth it; makes me feel good. I was elected leader so when we do well, I know the choice was the right one" (Malcolm). The personal fulfillment experienced was partly because participants believed accomplishing tasks validated their selection for that position, and their leadership within that position.

*Predominantly White organizations*

Barbara believed one of the best ways to measure success was through achieving organizational goals; doing so spoke to the quality of her leadership. In part, her organization's sustainability was directly tied to her "shepherding of the organization." She explained, "When I say we can do something, it needs to get done. I'm the Shepherd of this organization and as I go, so goes the organization! When we do well, I do well!" Jo Anne attributed her ability to lead effectively, in part, to her achievements on previous decisions, which increased her belief that she would continue to make the "right" decisions moving forward. When discussing his leadership in Camp Crimson, Martin stated: "The more I accomplish, the more I want to accomplish. If people keep showing up, I'll keep showing out! If the organization is successful, I know I'm successful. I believe in me because they believe in us." Although not all tasks were associated with tangible items like ensuring meetings were started on time or program development extending past that of previous years, participants often saw achieving tasks such as holding organization members accountable as reasons for belief in their individual leadership ability. For example, Ruby stated:

> Sometimes you can't just measure your success as a leader by the normal things like how many people came out to an event. Sometimes it's about how satisfied people are under your leadership or how displeased they are with what you're doing or not doing. Plus, getting things accomplished is about how clearly you communicate. If people don't understand what I want, how can they do it?

For some participants, the intangible parts of leading, like communicating clearly, were crucial for accomplishing tasks; in fact, for Martin, it was essential because: "Behind any successful organization is a leader who tries to understand what motivates each person to follow and finish what is started. If I can't determine who needs what,

then I'm responsible when things go unfinished." In fact, knowing that communicating clearly was an aspect of leading, often validated by peer confirmation, was primarily based on member responses to participants' leadership.

## Peer confirmation

Peer confirmation is defined as instances when organizational members affirmed participants' leadership abilities by verbalizing their approval of participants' leadership within their organizations. In both organizational types, peer support and validation of leadership positively affected the belief participants had in their capacity to lead.

### *Historically Black organizations*

Peer belief in their leadership abilities led participants to feel compelled to trust how they managed their organizations despite moments when they doubted themselves or their leadership. Eady spoke to this perspective: "My leadership is based on feedback. NAACP has unique needs and it is important that I see to it those needs are met. When I do so, I know my belief in myself as a leader is not in vain." This belief in peer opinions also motivated Shawn to "try to never see myself as less than a leader because they [peers] see me as a leader." For her this meant that members' perspectives of her as a leader kept her from seeing herself as anything less than a leader. To the participants peer affirmation was seen as being "us tested and us approved," as stated by Mattie, which validated their leadership efforts and served as tangible reflective points of success. Barbara offered these thoughts:

> Accountability is the best judge of the effectiveness of leadership. For me, when my peers let me know the quality of my work it counts because I can make adjustments or know to continue doing the same things that work for them.

Other participants deemed the triumph of overcoming organizational stressors, like budget shortfalls, as important. Hazel elaborated, "Sometimes the University of Southern government don't fund us appropriately so we have to fundraise. When we exceed expectations, I feel beyond valuable!" For most participants in historically Black organizations, confirmation as a leader by their peers was important because this also validated their Blackness or ability to responsibly lead African Americans, which "makes it all good when the hood gots your back!" (Malcolm).

*Predominantly White organizations*

In addition to viewing the accomplishment of tasks as an element of leadership confidence, participants like Shawn mentioned the power of an environment of "acknowledgment fostered by peer support." Participants found that when they were encouraged to continue leading, based on previous success, they were more engaged and less frustrated. Barack spoke to how his organization's acknowledgement of his leadership influenced his belief in his leadership: "I received the brother [fraternity] of the year award and it was confirmation of all of my hard work, which let me know I'm headed in the right direction as an upcoming leader." This belief in self-leadership abilities, which is enhanced by peer perspectives, also enabled participants to believe in organization members' ability to lead, which fostered reciprocal cycles of leadership support across organizational context. For example, Barack talked about how being "schooled" on leading made it easier for him to educate peers about being a leader

because:

> The best way to lead is by being open to following. My peers have taught me a lot about leadership, which makes sharing information with others just part of the process. I've been told what worked, so I spread the word to others about how to lead. Plus, we've worked together so often that we've learned each others' strengths and weakness, which makes it easier to give critiques of how we all lead.

Furthermore, acknowledgement in predominantly White organizations served to remind participants that their hard work and sacrifice was not in vain, because not only did it make the organization look good, but it also made themselves and other African Americans look good: "Hearing them [Whites] talk about how I've boosted morale within our residence hall means a lot because there's been racial divides that we needed to overcome and I think my being Black played a role in bettering the situation" (Shawn). Being African American allowed Shawn to center race in her leadership role, through purposefully inclusive programming that was beneficial to the residents of Layton Residence Hall. Moreover, positive affirmations from residents confirmed that her choice to add race to residential activities was correct. Peers' verbal expressions of their support and validation of participants' actions served to validate each leader and their leadership efforts. Although verbal approval was experienced most frequently by participants, physical validation was also shown in the form of attendance at organizational events.

### Program attendance

In both historically Black and predominantly White organizations, program attendance was one way participants measured individual and organizational support of their leadership, despite whether events were highly frequented or rarely attended.

*Historically Black organizations*

Participants saw the program attendance of members, whether at internal meetings or general public functions, as a clear indicator of organizational and individual support of them as leaders. Malcolm expressed: "Coming out to our events is crucial because high turnout means we gave the people what they wanted and in some instances, what they needed. If we don't do Black programming, it won't get done on this campus." Malcolm's judgment of the value of providing programming for African American students, in the absence of institutional offerings, was shared by Barbara: "It is important to see whether our work is working. One of the best ways is by seeing feet in the seats." This determination that Black organizations are responsible for meeting the needs of African American students was not only a sentiment expressed by participants, but also was the mission of each historically Black organization represented. In fact, participants' belief in the missions of these organizations further reinforced their argument that if the university did not provide for African American students, they would.

Additionally, organizational members' attendance was a clear indicator to participants that resources were allocated appropriately. This perspective was expressed by Yssis who stated, "When we invest our money in programming and people turn out we know we made the right investment; if not, they wouldn't bother coming out to get the information or service." Ruby added, "I pinch pennies for this organization so I need to see full support when we do things for the students; if not, I feel some kind of negative way about it." Other participants felt that planning organizational activities was partly a personal investment and that low attendance meant peers were indirectly unsupportive of their leadership, which resulted in feelings of disappointment. Jo Anne said, "It hurts

when you spend time creating opportunities and people don't take advantage of the offerings. It's a negative reflection on you as the head of the organization." These perspectives are indicative of participants wanting to provide positive experiences for African American members of their organizations as part of their positional and cultural responsibility. They did not share this sentiment about White colleagues and the predominantly White organizations they also led.

*Predominantly White organizations*

Participants indicated that their predominantly White organizational community members' presence, regardless of racial context, served as affirmation of their ability to lead. Hazel said:

> A lot of hours goes into determining what events we want to do, how they should be carried out, the purpose, who we expect to show up and how many people in attendance equals success. If I work hard in putting together a function, I expect it to be attended, especially by my sorority sisters; if not, I'll be disappointed.

High turnouts helped foster organizational environments where participants know they are successful leaders. Doris saw this perspective as important:

> When your people [members] are supportive, by repeatedly being present at events, at everyone's events, then it becomes about us having each others' backs, not just well, that was his or her project and I only do this or that when my committee events come up. It becomes about all of us, which is like magic!

Consequently, when participants knew they had peer support, they were more interested in becoming an accomplished leader, which was seen as creating an organizational following that overcame the yard politics. Yssis expounded:

> Historically NPHC and IFC are sort of at odds so when I see Tri-Deltas and AKAs at our events I know it's about more than our racial sorority differences; it's about women supporting women. Like our date rape seminar recently, sisters from all the Divine Nine and NPH represented so it felt good to see the variety,

which isn't necessarily the norm, especially race wise.

In part, transcending organizational politics or legacies of nonunity between organizations meant a great deal to participants, especially as it contributed to becoming what they viewed as an accomplished leader.

**Study generalities**

Throughout the findings each participant showed aspects of servant and transformational leadership albeit some more frequently than others. As leaders in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations, participants learned that their leadership experiences were influenced by the micro-organization racial climate and mission, which were focused on race (e.g., double consciousness; Du Bois, 1903) or professional development. Leading a variety of constituents, within different organizational contexts, shaped participants' perceptions of how a successful leader should be versatile when leading; specifically, their contextualized experiences redefined their perceptions of not only how to lead African American followers, but Whites as well.

Overall, participants strove to create organizational change whether motivated by fulfilling the needs of members first or by convincing members to buy into organizational agendas, which ultimately made participation in their organizations beneficial to all those involved. In fact, participants all recognized that their Blackness was a central aspect of their leadership because it was filtered through a lens of racial double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) that impacted their organizational, and contextualized experiences. Yet individually, each determined how Blackness was performed, when to utilize it and what it meant to be Black within African American and White organizational spaces.

**Alternative narratives**

As I interpreted the narratives of participants it became clear that there were three students who experienced leading in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations in more nuanced ways than other participants, which influenced their motivations for leading and how they led in each context. Although these experiences are not the same as other participants', and have not been presented in the overarching themes, they are valuable to the study, so I detail them below.

"Hybrid" historically Black organizations

Two participants, Doris and Mattie, are members of a historically Black organization directly connected to their major area of study, the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), which simultaneously prepares them for entering their chosen professions while providing cultural connectedness. None of the other participants were members of organizations that served these dual functions. In fact, for Doris and Mattie NSBE served as a "hybrid" historically Black organization because it provided racial validation and professional preparedness by offering career socialization opportunities for aspiring African American engineers who ultimately graduate and enter the workforce. To illustrate, Mattie stated: "At the University of Southern we try to inform the membership about engineering internships and general events like those held by the BSU. It's important that we keep Black engineers posted about all of college life, not just engineering." For Doris, NSBE served multiple purposes pertaining to engineering professional development. She stated:

> As a Freshman, being in NSBE has been very helpful. The upperclassmen have warned me about certain professors, helped me with managing my time and told

> me about their experiences with applying for jobs. Plus, they have basically taught me where everything is in the engineering quad, including where to get the best soy chai latte!

Merging Black engineering students within the engineering and African American culture was a unique organizational benefit because "NSBE is for us, you know, to help our students fit into campus because there's so few of us that the organization is responsible for helping us feel comfortable" said Mattie.

Unlike historically Black cultural and predominantly White normative organizations, NSBE, a hybrid historically Black organization, served as a place where cultural validation was fostered, and professional nurturing took place in alignment with participants' majors. According to Mattie:

> Working with NSBE is crucial because there are so few of us in engineering on campus, which is why I wanted to become events chair so I could reach out to Black engineers about a variety of topics including racial and engineering stuff.

Doris added the following concerning the benefits of participating in a hybrid historically Black organization:

> Being in NSBE is good because you can ask specific questions in front of your [Black] peers without wondering whether you're seen as incompetent like in class when you're the only one. It's a good place to learn about scholarships, make friends and see who is doing what within the field.

Participating in NSBE both Doris and Mattie learned the value of having the freedom to develop professionally as African American student leaders without operating under the normative gaze of their White peers. Doris stated, "Here, I can be myself and focus on the field, plus I have the benefit of knowing that I can relax in NSBE because it was made for me, the engineer, who is also Black." Additionally, although Doris and Mattie were members of other historically Black organizations, which implicitly taught them how to present themselves in a professional manner, these organizations were not

explicitly created to develop them in leadership capacities that related to their major areas.

Race advocating while leading

The third person whose leadership experience was more nuanced, Hazel, is biracial, which made her experience of the micro-organizational climates of historically Black and predominantly White organizations different. Hazel shared a narrative that described her ability to transition between organizations as relatively easy compared to other participants.

> Since I'm not really one [Black] or the other [White] being in both types of organizations is important and it helps because it teaches me how to bring the two together. I'm cool in both, but not all of my friends are comfortable.

Although her level of comfort varied based on moments when her Blackness was in question in each organizational type, being racially socialized in both African American and White cultural environments prior to college often served as an asset to Hazel's ability to lead.

> Being raised with my mom I had to work through fears about my dad's side [Black], but since middle school I've been in mixed environments so I've learned the stereotypes aren't always true so it's easier to interact with both my sides in both settings.

Hazel's ability to critically unpack and position herself within each organizational type, without significant discomfort, was an experience unique to her; specifically, she was the only biracial student in the study.

Concerning participating in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations as a biracial leader, Hazel offered the following:

> I feel comfortable in both organizations because I know about each culture. My

> mom is White and dad is African American so I'm not fearful of either side. Some of my peers are ignorant about each race, so I see it as my responsibility as a leader to educate each group about the other.

Hazel's unique understanding of racial cues and norms allows her to flourish in each of the leadership positions she occupies. She added, "I took the roles of social and program chairs because these positions allowed me to create events that could crossover. I've brought my sorority sisters to Black events and took my Black friends to sorority events." In phenotypical terms Hazel sees herself as racially ambiguous, which also adds to her ability to travel between organizational types. She noted, "When people see me they know I'm not just White, but can't categorize me as Black only. People hesitate, watch what they say and pay close attention. I use it to my advantage." Although Hazel experienced the emergent themes presented earlier, the frequency and ways in which she did clearly differed from the other participants; in part due to organizational functionality, mission, racial constituency make-up and context.

Juggling responsibilities

Five participants (Hazel (4), Yssis (5), Martin (4), Doris (4) and Eady (5)) held leadership positions in multiple organizations [( ) denotes the number of organizations], which at times consumed their time to the point that it affected their social and academic lives because "juggling responsibilities is hard!" (Doris). Although integrating leadership, social and academic commitments was not an emergent theme, managing time was important to these participants. Hazel stated, "Although I've actively tried to be involved, sometimes it feels like I'm in over my head." Yssis added, "As a Senior, I've want to be as connected to the campus as possible so my name will be out there; possibly get a job.

The rush is good, but I could do less. It would be easier." Being involved in a variety of organizations there were numerous times when the pressures of leadership responsibilities influenced how these participants engaged themselves scholastically, which spoke to their awareness of balancing academics and leading.

Each of these 5 participants voiced concerns about deciding when to lead and when to study or socialize. Martin stated, "This is college! I'll never get these years back so I'm going to go all in, but I realize I need to graduate so sometimes I step back and let my e-board lead." Eady had a similar perspective:

> Being President of the NAACP is draining sometimes for a variety of reasons. Don't get me wrong, I love doing it, but I need to vanish too. I need to make sure I'm prepared for graduate school, which means I need time to prepare for entrance exams. Sometimes I just can't do this so I lean on my VP to lead in my absences. Not to say that I'm like avoiding my responsibilities, but I'm more than the president, I'm a student too!

In addition to negotiating time in order to be successful in leadership and academics, participants like Yssis mentioned the stress associated with leading: "Being involved zaps you. It makes me want to sleep for days even though I can't, which is stressful! Doris added, "At times just being in one organization will drive you crazy, and I'm aware of how my body responds when I'm under pressure so I try to avoid it by dividing out the work with everybody." Hazel summed up the value of juggling responsibilities with the following:

> Although being involved keeps me active to the point where I don't study as often as I should, it also helps me make new friends, especially attending all these events. I get to meet new people, go to new places, see how other people do things differently than I do, find out what we have in common. Sure, I get stressed doing everything, but it's worth it because I'm learning how to be a college student, I'm learning how to be a sorority sister, I'm learning how to embrace all of myself, which is what matters most to me.
>
> Additionally, despite realizing that leading can consume time and cause stress all

of the participants were eager to continue in their leadership roles and, like Martin said, "charged it to the game." This comment is typically used within the Hip Hop community to mean that whatever adverse experiences come from being involved or "playing the game" are accepted and understood as the cost of participating or doing business. Although these participants discussed balancing their leadership roles with their scholastic and social lives, none of them differentiated between organizational type or discussed the stress they experienced as specific to their historically Black or predominantly White organizations.

Utilizing technology

Eight participants discussed using social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Socialcam as supplemental forms of applying "online leadership" (Barack) across organizational type. These platforms were used to inform constituents about the relevancy of implementing agendas, showing a sense of urgency to accomplish individual and group goals, promoting upcoming events, membership drives, and even fundraising. Although interacting in-person with constituents was mentioned by participants as the primary and preferred way of enacting leadership, utilizing the internet provided an efficient way to extend participants' leadership into virtual reality. Malcolm stated:

> There was plenty of times I Facebooked or Tweeted something at the last minute when I knew there was no way to call for or conduct an emergency meeting to inform my officers about a variety of issues or situations. I mean, it's basically point and click and I can reach hundreds of students, or other groups in a quick second, plus receive instant feedback. I like using social media, but sometimes it can be a pain because sometimes people can forward stuff I only meant for them.

For these particular participants, being able to effectively utilize their time was seen as valuable and doing so through accessing social media provided additional opportunities

to begin and complete necessary organization member interactions without having to do so at a fixed location.

Additionally, although using social media was seen as a beneficial digital format to be used by participants to quickly contact organizational members, participants also viewed these digital platforms as a way to expose constituents to both their personal and professional leadership identities. Yssis explained, "I use Facebook for professional purposes because it has become more formal over time, plus, potential employers have asked me to grant them access to it." Eady added, "Facebook is helpful because it allows us to show pictures and videos of events in real time, which better builds the organization's brand and its leaders by showing our professional sides." In contrast, Barbara stated, "Twitter is my place where I allow people to see the real me. I mean, I curse a little there. Basically, I'm more honest there because I don't have to sensor myself like I do on Facebook." Shawn lamented, "Although I have less followers on Twitter than Facebook, I use it to show people I don't play. I'm a serious, respectful person at all times and I reinforce it on Twitter." When engaging peers and colleagues across these platforms participants were also mindful of the social media reach, which kept them mindful that someone is always watching and possibly recording their words even over the Internet. This realization was partly the motivation behind why participants purposefully chose to reveal their personal and professional leadership identities separately. Barack summed it up by stating, "An internet post can last forever, which is why I'm strategic and careful when pressing 'send.'"

Indeed, participants viewed using social media platforms to enact leadership as beneficial for all the abovementioned reasons, but also saw having the option to do so as

an added way to monitor followers and organizational members' behaviors; personal and professional alike. Furthermore, this option was seen by participants as an extension of their leadership ability, which, partly helped them to gauge who would best fit in their organizations based on the they assumptions made by having access to persons unfiltered perspectives on social media. Mattie best described the leadership extension:

> I like the "Big Brother" aspects of social media. I can basically watch anyone in my organizations with or without them knowing, whether doing it myself or asking someone else to. One time I thought I resolved an issue with a person, and I later learned that they still had a problem with me by reading some things they posted on Facebook. This made me deal with them in a less friendly manner for the rest of the semester because I could no longer trust them. Had I not looked on Facebook, I would have never known.

Finally, in being able to "watch how they [organizational members or colleagues] really feel" (Yssis), participants felt they were better informed leaders, which allowed them to predetermine how they would interact with people and respond to situations. Therefore, participants perceived doing so as a key advantage when enacting leadership.

**Findings summary**

In this chapter thematic findings of the study were presented. Based on participants' narratives, which derived from their lived experiences as leaders in historically Black and predominantly White organizations. The following four themes emerged: 1) resistant apathy; 2) fluidity of Blackness; 3) positional responsibility and 4) leader efficacy enhancement. When presented cumulatively these themes offer an understanding of how African American students experience leadership in historically Black and predominantly White organizations. Each of the themes reported here contributed to participants' successful leadership in both historically Black and

predominantly White organizations as they engaged group members while constructively managing organization agendas, negotiating their Black identities and motivating peers to stay active by holding them accountable to counteract apathy. Consequently, these experiences positively influenced participants' belief in their leadership and willingness to continue engaging in leadership activities. Although it was not a direct impediment to leading, some participants mentioned the stress experienced when involved in several organizations, which at times precluded them from focusing on academics and ultimately caused them to delegate to members and officers more often than they preferred.

In Chapter VI, a discussion of the findings in light of previous literature is provided. The chapter concludes with implications for faculty and student affairs administrators, as well as suggestions for future research pertaining to African American student leadership at historically White institutions.

# CHAPTER VI

## DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This discussion analyzes study findings and serves to explain how these findings extend current literature about how African American students lead, and the ways micro-organizational racial climates influence their leadership. In this chapter, I examine the findings by answering the guiding research questions and discussing the four themes within the context of the existing literature. I highlight implications and recommendations for student affairs professionals and practitioners in order to inform their work with African American student leaders who are attending predominantly White institutions seeking degree attainment. Additionally, I offer institutional policy and practice suggestions that directly facilitate the involvement of higher education administrators in the development of African American student leaders. Finally, I propose directions for future research related to African American student leadership involvement, development and close with a reflexive offering to bring the dissertation full circle.

**Discussion of research questions**

The discussion of this study's findings is framed by the following guiding research questions:

1) What motivates African American students to join historically Black and predominantly White organizations?
2) How do African American students experience being leaders in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations?
3) How are African American students' leader efficacies influenced by participating in leadership roles within historically Black and predominantly White organizations?

*What motivates African American students to join historically Black and predominantly White organizations*?

Participants were motivated to join contextually different types of organizations for distinctly different reasons. In historically Black organizations, there was a desire to experience cultural validation, give back to their communities, help other African American students navigate the campus and find a sense of belonging. In predominantly White organizations, there was an effort to build networks for the purpose of utilizing connections beneficial in securing employment upon graduating, to diversify their leadership experiences and interactions with a variety of students and to disrupt racial stereotypes while integrating. Participants' decisions to join each type of organization grew from a desire to be involved in something other than academic, in-class activities. The majority of participants involved held leadership roles throughout their high school years, in church, cultural entities, and sports teams or by learning from parental

examples. This precollege leadership exposure gave participants a sense of responsibility and challenged them to be involved in college organizations.

Having developed a desire to lead, participants became involved by attempting to transform their organizations and campus climates, and through being invested in the leadership development of their African American peers. Because the majority of their African American peers were also leaders in historically Black organizations, participants took it upon themselves to be involved outside of Black leadership circles with the purpose of discovering additional campus resources not necessarily readily available to historically Black organizations. Participants realized that institutional resources would never be accessed for the greater good of African American students, unless someone was aware of the processes by which to acquire those resources.

*How do African American students experience being leaders in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations?*

The ways participants experienced leadership in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations varied drastically, yet subtly, when considering how the achievement of goals influenced their leader efficacy. Participants' leadership experiences were highly contextualized and included the following: 1) how they presented their "Blackness" publically versus during meetings; 2) investments they made in the leadership development of peer members; 3) utilization of organizations to serve African American communities away from campus; and 4) the degree to which they mentored others and their rationale for doing so.

In predominantly White organizations participants felt they had to tone down or mute their cultural expressions of "Blackness," based on the presence of their White

colleagues; which I interpreted as partly influenced by participants' racial "double consciousness" (Du Bois, 1903) and awareness of the normative gaze of Whiteness. In fact, some participants perceived themselves as under racial hypersurveillance, which they attributed to stereotypical notions of Black students never being "as good as Whites" (Yssis). This perception contributed to participants' focus on transforming predominantly White organizational norms, practices and policies in effort to increase inclusivity. Conversely, participants also found that predominantly White organizations encouraged their voices pertaining to social justice issues while simultaneously challenging their diversity-minded ways of thinking.

In contrast, participants defended the authenticity of their "Blackness," which was questioned at times, while leading in historically Black organizations. Specifically, their "Blackness" was questioned because of their desire to engage in cooperative opportunities with predominantly White organizations or racially diversify the membership of historically Black organizations. Despite this, participants remained in leadership roles in historically Black organizations because these ethnic enclaves still acted as semisafe spaces by shielding participants from the racism experienced on campus. For the most part, participants experienced being involved in both types of organizations as challenging for a variety of reasons: 1) learning to juggle organizational and academic commitments; 2) dealing with the stress of leadership; and 3) balancing their lives socially and with leadership roles. However, participants also perceived both historically Black and predominantly White organizations as places where leadership development was encouraged, nurtured and allowed.

Micro-organizational contextual factors contributed to participants leading

differently in historically Black (servant leadership) and predominantly White (transformational leadership) organizations. These differences were primarily based on the race of constituents and double consciousness awareness (Du Bois, 1903), but also were influenced by how members responded to their leadership, and the level of support and resistance received from members. These factors affected participants' leadership behaviors and how they perceived themselves as empowered to lead within each organization, which in turn contributed to their leadership development and identity. Subsequently, the ways they engaged their leadership were based on the micro-organizational climates that influenced how they perceived each organization (psychologically) and how they responded (behaved) as a result of experiencing the formal and informal interactions therein. In short, they joined historically Black organizations because of the organizational histories of support for African American students and the structural dimensions that were culturally congruent with their "Blackness." They joined predominantly White organizations for the perceived benefit of building professional networks that would lead to employment or the graduate school of their choice.

*How are African American students' leader efficacies influenced by participating in leadership roles within historically Black and predominantly White organizations?*

Participants' leader efficacy was positively affected regardless of the organizational context. However, participants attached a racially influenced value to leader efficacy when their leadership actions benefitted African American students or communities. Specifically, they felt sense of racial pride when the outcome of their work positively advanced the lives of Black people. Otherwise, in predominantly White and

historically Black organizations participants associated an enhanced leader efficacy with accomplishing tasks, receiving peer affirmation, the number of attendees at meeting and events, and the degree to which they were mentored by organizational advisors and faculty. These mentoring experiences allowed participants to gauge not only their reassessed responses to leadership critiques, but also their ability to evaluate peer members' leadership abilities and provide constructive advice about improving their leadership. Fundamentally, participants' success in leadership roles was predicated on the fulfillment of organizational outcomes that served to better the organization's circumstances, bolster membership and sustain or create a positive legacy. The answers to each research question provided rich data that offer significant contributions to the extant literature about African American college student leadership.

**Discussion of findings amidst the literature**

Micro-organizational affects

This section anchors the findings of the study within relevant studies that discuss, among other topics, the influence predominantly White institutional context has on African American students. In particular, connections are made between institutional (macro), and organizational (micro) contexts concerning various ways macro- and micro-environments affect racial perceptions and leadership behaviors of study participants. Moreover, how African American student leaders respond to, cope with and navigate these campus and microorganizational climates is explored in this section.

Specifically, this study found that micro-organizational climates, much like predominantly White macro-institutional climates, affected the perceptions of African

American student leaders and their subsequent leadership behaviors. In this study participants' contextual experiences, which are based on the campus racial climate (Hurtado, et al., 1998), yet influenced by micro-organizational climates, contributed to participants exhibiting servant and transformational leadership behaviors (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Burns, 1977; Greenleaf, 1978). Specifically, micro-organizational climates influenced the following: 1) participants' motivations for joining organizations; 2) their reasons for staying involved in leadership roles; 3) the perceived benefits of leading; and 4) their desire to either appease African American members or change the functionality of their mainstream organizations.

Although participants experienced member support in historically Black organizations, at times, if leadership goals were not in line with Black communal expectations, their ability to lead was negatively hampered. In response, participants educated organizational members about their responsibilities, the seriousness of their roles and the value associated with accomplishing goals. Participants' efforts to help members become more involved in fulfilling the organizations' overarching goals, attempt to create buy in, and motivate followers to take their roles more seriously and contribute in a greater manner, were clearly evident. Participants also assessed the needs of followers to determine how they could empower them to accomplish tasks, while giving followers a sense of fulfillment. In historically Black organizations, participants perceived resistance when peers frequently missed important meetings and relinquished responsibilities during critical times. These types of contextual experiences contributed to participants leading as servants versus transformers (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1978) based on a desire to appease fellow African American students as

opposed to changing how their mainstream organizations constrained the leadership of their offices held.

Although participants talked about their leadership experiences in regard to combating what they perceived as follower complacency, their justification for attempting to motivate members to increase their resistance varied along organizational context and racial lines (Fleming, 1984; Hurtado, et al, 1998; Museus, 2008). In historically Black organizations, participants' actions to motivate members were based on a desire to dispel individual and organizational stereotypes about African Americans, such as laziness and disinterest in educational engagement. This desire to present the Black race in positive terms, to disrupt the historical negative majoritarian narrative, corresponds with Harper and Quaye (2007) and Komives, Owen and Longerbeam's (2005) findings where African American males, in their purposeful actions, attempted to not reinforce Black stereotypes. However, the participants in the two aforementioned studies of African American's were all male, while this study included male and female participants. This is significant because like their African American male counterparts, female participants acted to counteract stereotypes associated with African American females, as well as the race at large.

Mattie stated, "As one of few minorities in my sorority, I focus on not coming off as the angry Black woman," while Hazel added, "I'm aware that if my Black organization fails we all look bad." Martin stated, "Our organizations [Black] are a reflection of us, so when I shine, we shine and when we shine our organizations [Black] look great!" When leading in predominantly White organizations participants also encouraged members to ensure that their authority was not usurped by coming off as an unsupportive independent

leader. Recognizing their authority as independent leaders aligned with concept of the *leader identified* stage of leadership identity development found in Komives, Owen and Longerbean (2005) and Logue, Hutchens and Hector (2005). In this leader-centric stage (Komives, et al., 2005), leaders believe leadership ability is based solely on position and lacks a dependence on followers' help. Additionally, leaders have different levels of input than followers based on their positions (Logue, et al., 2005), which allow them to guide followers toward the accomplishment of organizational agendas.

Although cultural organizations have served as ethnically affirming enclaves (Yancey, 2003) where African American students are validated due to their culturally connected "Blackness" (Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus, 2008; Smith & Moore, 2000) this narrative is not always applicable. In fact, a contradiction lies at the intersection of organizational purpose, mission statement fulfillment and African American students' choices of where and with whom they decided to lead based on the perceived micro-organization racial climate. To illustrate, "I'm apart of the AFRO AM because I'm Black, it's like the default place. I belong here." (Malcolm). However, because Malcolm assumes he belongs because the AFRO AM is "for" Black students, he still has issues with his "Blackness" being questioned because "if you're too universal there is a problem. I get that the AFRO AM is for [Black students] us, but does that mean only us?" His assumption is based on the Southern State University AFRO AM organizational mission that states, "The purpose of the African American Student Association (Afro-Am) is to host events and programs that promote the growth and interests of the African American community" (https://campuslink.okstate.edu/organization/africanamerican-student-association/about).

The success of African American student leaders in this study was partly due to their ability to assess the micro-organization racial climate of each organizational type, find their place therein and contribute in organizations where they felt they were institutionally valued as African American students and nurtured as leaders. In fact, participants in this study ultimately perceived themselves as valued by members, which enabled them to lead successfully. Moreover, leading in both historically Black and predominately White student organizations facilitated participants' sociocultural leadership development because they could determine distinct and nuanced differences in each micro-organizational racial climate.

Participants discussed a sense of "giving back" (Hazel) to their [Black] communities by using positional authority to create service-related agendas in historically Black organizations and to further eliminate stereotypical perceptions of "Blackness" within predominantly White organizations. Specifically, participants mentioned working in historically Black organizations out of an accepted racial obligation, while seeking a sense of cultural connectedness. "Grammy always told me I was standing on the shoulders of giants and doing so meant at every opportunity I should give back," said Mattie, who was echoed by Martin: "Crafting leadership skills here [Black organizations] is beneficial because I get to give back to my community while learning how to lead and watch others lead." This rationale confirms African American students' motivation to join Black organizations because it was expected by their families that they join (Arminio, et al., 2000). These organizations had a positive impact on African American students' commitment to their own racial and ethnic communities (Inkelas, 2004), and served as places where they could be themselves (Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye,

2007; Museus, 2008). Additionally, the desire to give back to their communities supported findings of Dugan, Komives and Segar (2008) and Clayborne and Hamrick (2007), which noted that a strength of African American student leadership is a cultural orientation to collectivism.

Although this giving back rationale was experienced across all participants, their positional responsibility looked different in predominantly White organizations. Participants associated joining these organizations with developing networks through accessing professional connections to use in the workforce after graduation. "It's not what you know, it's who you know" (Eady). This finding is similar to that of Harper and Quaye (2007) who found that African American student leaders viewed predominantly White organizations as resource points that granted access to opportunities not necessarily available to African American students on campus. Participants also saw predominantly White organizations as possible gateways to accessing resources in the form of future career opportunities, which further extends Harper and Quaye's (2007) research. Subsequently, determining the location of campus resources, be they financial or opportunistic, was seen as a task that a responsible leader should accomplish regardless of the organization context.

**Racial identity**

Although the Komives, Owen and Longerbean (2005) and Arminio, et al. (2000) studies acknowledge race as the most salient leadership identity for students of color, they fail to tie racial saliency to a rationale for joining organizations. Additionally, neither study connected the race of leaders to how they led same-race versus members

from different races or ethnicities or how African American participants' double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) influenced their enacting of leadership. In this study participants' race was an overarching reason for encouraging same-race members to fulfill their leadership responsibilities, partly due to ensuring that African American leaders were seen as excellent. Subsequently, once participants saw themselves as leaders, through the affirmation of African American and White peers, they further acted to create change within their organizations by empowering members to follow. Furthermore, although participants also empowered White constituents to follow, they did not talk about this in relation to White constituents' racial identities within formalized organizational groups.

In predominantly White organizations, participants' desire to build positive legacies was also connected to their individual racial identities, which they wanted to preserve for the African American leaders who will replace them in the future. This desire to preserve legacies is similar to the findings of Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Minella and Osteen (2006) where participants were concerned about the sustainability of their groups and their role as leaders ensuring that the efficient functionality of organizations continued. However, Komives, et al. (2006) did not link participants' desires to achieve sustainability to racialized organizational missions, which was the case in my study, in which participants sought to keep Black organizations functional because they saw value in having same-race ethnic connectedness, yet did not see predominantly White organizations as inherently culturally valuable. Specifically, interacting with African American peers in historically Black organizations reinforced the value of being "Black" and all that it positively encompassed culturally. However, being "Black" in

predominantly White organizations meant participants acted to deconstruct stereotypes about African Americans, partly in effort to help shift the normative gaze of Whiteness' cultural expectations in a positive, nonstereotypical manner, rather than expecting to have their Blackness celebrated by White colleagues.

Jones (1997) and Komives, Owen and Longerbeam (2005) found that students' most salient identity was the one associated with a minority status and that this identification was central to their leadership development. Racial identity, as defined by Helms (1990) is "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (p. 3). Participants in this study often saw themselves as connected to the larger African American community due to sharing a common heritage. However, this commonality was limited because of the challenges participants experienced surrounding their "Blackness".

Despite not definitively measuring how "Black" participants saw themselves, it was clear that participants' racial identities were at the forefront of their leadership consciousness in a variety of ways to include recognizing distinct differences between contextual, racialized environments. This was clear in their reasons for joining and leading in historically Black organizations. Barack stated, "It is definitely easier to lead when surrounded with my people" and Doris added, "Being around us [African Americans] is just better because I'm accepted as is." This confirmed research by scholars who argued that African American students join same-race organizations based on a desire to experience cultural connectedness and validation (Arminio, et al., 2000; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus, 2008; Yancy, 2003). However, despite participants experiencing cultural connectedness and validation, they also felt a disconnection and

invalidation when their "Blackness" was questioned. None of the previous studies discussed the issue of cultural invalidation and disconnect in same-race organizations, or how experiencing these negative affects influenced students' leadership.

When discussing the benefit of being Black in predominantly White organizations participants mentioned partaking in sociocultural exchanges, which allowed them educate White peers about inclusivity because "people listen to my perspectives about a variety of topics; especially social justice" (Malcolm). Finding value in sociocultural discussions with White peers aligns with Dugan and Komives' research (2010), which found sociocultural conversations as the strongest environmental predictors of socially responsible leadership. Furthermore, Harper and Quaye (2007) noted that sociocultural conversations are beneficial to African American students because the interactions allow them to work with students from different races, religions, nationalities, socioeconomic statuses and sexual orientations.

However, participants also discussed challenges to their "Blackness" that were based on their association with predominantly White organizations. White's research (1998) discussed the pressures placed on African American students by fellow African Americans to participate in same-race organizations, which is in part why African American students avoid being leaders in mainstream organizations (Harper, 1975; Sutton & Terrell, 1997). This research parallels Mattie's perspective about peer scrutiny of her racial identity: "Because I'm in a White sorority, my Blackness is definitely up for discussion, no matter how well I lead in NSBE someone is always going to ask 'is she really, Black, Black?'" Despite being criticized about the authenticity of their "Blackness" participants were still active in predominantly White organizations. Their

involvement was motivated by the need to address inadequate representation of African American students and a desire to help make those organizations more diverse. Furthermore, participants felt a sense of belonging outside of solely ethnic spaces, which supports the argument that Black students join and are involved in mainstream organizations to find a sense of group acceptance (Astin, 1999; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005; Pounds, 1987). In predominantly White organizations participants embraced their leadership roles and welcomed being seen and referred to as the "leader." This contradicts the Arminio et al. (2000) finding that African American students rejected the "leader label" because "being a leader suggested to them that they bought into the system that oppressed their racial group, thus alienating them from their peers" (p. 500). In fact, having the leader designation in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations further allowed participants to be seen as the person in authority, which they perceived as aiding their ability to lead.

Additionally, in predominantly White organizations participants discussed being perceived as having racial agendas regardless of the organizational mission, goals or purposes. Being seen as inclusion or social justice personified was problematic for participants because although part of their goals centered on diversifying their organizations, it was often assumed that this was their primary purpose because they are African American. Yet another perception derived due to having a double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) awareness, which partly guided participants to reaching conclusions like the aforementioned as it related to their White colleagues. In response, participants felt they had to present their "Blackness" in less authentic, relaxed, or more professional terms, which contributed to a perceived need to "speak scholarly" and "dress up" when

interacting with White peers (Shawn). Shawn added, "I present myself as all about business, you know, nicely dressed because in that organization [White] it's only about business. Being 'Black' don't necessarily translate the same way across organizations." Feeling a need to change behaviors, language and appearances when participating in predominantly White organizations confirms previous research, which found that African American student leaders often feel a loss of self and a need to assimilate (Arminio, et al., 2000; Steward, Jackson & Jackson, 1990). However, although participants did at times tone down their performance of "Blackness" to be perceived as more "professional" by White peers, none of them did so with the intent to assimilate, which affirms Du Bois' (1903) belief that although African Americans are aware of Whiteness, they are not driven to aspire to embrace White normative values or behaviors.

The findings from this study are consistent with previous research that found participating in student organizations was beneficial for African American students attending historically White institutions (Dugan & Komives; 2010; Flowers, 2004; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Museus, 2008). The data illustrate that campus racial climate (Hurtado, 1994), when applied in micro-organizational terms, does influence the ways African American students lead in historically Black and predominantly White student organizations. Specifically, participants saw a positive legacy of inclusion, concerning both organizations, which was one factor concerning their reasons for joining initially. However, within each context, participants also experienced their organizations as unsafe. This finding supports research about predominantly White organizations as not allowing students of color to get in touch with their cultural identities, silencing and representative of spaces where African American

students spent time responding to racist remarks (Arminio, et al., 2000; Stewart, Jackson & Jackson, 1990). Yet the findings contradict findings pertaining to historically Black organizations that are positioned as culturally validating and nurturing of African American students (Cuyjet, 1997; Patton & Bonner, 2001). Participants' perceptions of how they were treated in each organization impacted their leadership behaviors, which were either servant or transformational (Burns, 1977; Greenleaf, 1978).

**Responses to leadership**

Although these perceptual experiences were subjectively nuanced, participants indicated that members responded to their leadership differently based on the structural properties of each organization, (e.g., race of constituents), as well as whether the organizational context was cultural versus professional (e.g., Black Student Union, Alpha Kappa Psi Business Fraternity, Inc.). To illustrate, participants attempted to apply communal agendas in historically Black organizations, where they actively led to fulfill members' needs. However, in predominantly White organizations participants displayed a willingness to achieve organizational change by applying organization agendas for the betterment of the body first as opposed to that of individual members. Member and officer interactions (e.g., people), leadership context (e.g., organizational) and success achieved (e.g., actions completed) influenced how participants engaged each organization, which supports Logue, Hutchens and Hector's (2005) postulation that "Participants may experience leadership differently based on the organization and its cultural context (e.g., a sorority vs. a religious organization)" (p. 406). In many ways this distinction proved true for participants, which led to them utilizing servant leadership in

historically Black organizations and transformational leadership in predominantly White organizations.

Along cultural lines, participants decided to lead in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations even though some African American peers scrutinized their racial loyalty and challenged their leadership perspectives related to what was best for the Black community socially or politically. Based on perceptual dimensions (Hurtado, 1992, Hurtado, et al., 1998) participants attributed this scrutiny to members wanting to be certain their leaders were "truly down for the cause," as Malcolm, President of the African American Student Association, stated. These challenges were offset by the sense of belonging and cultural validation they felt while leading in historically Black organizations (Arminio, 2000; Cuyjet, 2006; Kimbrough & Hutcheson, 1998; Museus, 2008). In contrast, in some instances, participants deemed their predominantly White organizations as more supportive of their professional development as leaders, despite the perceived racial angst of their White peers who participants believed held them under hypersurveillance (Smith, 2008; Smith, Allen, & Danley; 2007).

Additionally, participants saw themselves as leading in different organizations in order to not only belong, but also to build a better leadership capacity by serving more than one type of constituency. This belief contributed to each participant choosing to maintain leadership positions in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations despite the perceived resistance. This finding aligns with the notion that as student leaders develop their view of leadership broadens, which is influenced by the groups they join (Komives, Owen & Longerbeam, 2005). However, participants in this

study developed a broad sense of leadership in racialized terms, which was not the case in the Komives, et al. (2005) research. To enumerate, because of participants' intertwined racial and leadership identities, based on how they experienced each micro-organizational climate, the ways they viewed "leadership" were delineated by peer (Black) and colleague (White) perceptions. Moreover, this delineation influenced how participants engaged groups, interpreted peer perspectives and constructed "leadership" (Komives, et al., 2005), which was filtered through a racial lens.

According to Chan and Drasgow (2001) a person's motivation to lead is based on distal (i.e., cognitive ability, values, personality) and proximal antecedents (i.e., past leadership experience, leadership self-efficacy), which also influence a leader's aspirations. Similar to campus racial climates, which are filtered through a racial lens, the influence of distal and proximal perceptions also impacts the extent to which students of color experience the environment as racially welcoming or hostile (Hurtado, 2011). The leadership aspirations of participants in this study were shaped by personal agendas in historically Black and professional agendas in predominantly White organizations. In accordance with the literature related to the benefits of joining culturally affirming historically Black organizations (Fleming, 1984; Guiffrida, 2003; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Kimbrough & Hutchenson, 1998), each participant chose to lead in these organizations to fulfill a desire for racial validation, nurturing and inclusivity.

Participants also recognized their positional authority, identified themselves as leaders and viewed their organizations as hierarchical, which meant they were "cognizant of roles, structures, and processes to accomplish group goals," (Komives, et al., 2006, p. 407). This allowed them to further believe in themselves as leaders and embrace the

notion that nonpositional leadership is accomplished when positional leaders facilitate the process. Barbara described how her positional authority is bolstered by her track record: "I've been in this position 2 straight years now so I know what I'm talking about concerning what residents need. Plus, people have seen me lead…so when I talk they listen." Furthermore, because participants were aware of their positional authority, they had a clear understanding of organizational divisions of labor and viewed themselves as different from regular organizational members (Logue, Hutchens & Hector, 2005), which made it easier to delegate tasks. An example of task delegation is Barbara's understanding that "when we need things for our residence hall, because I'm president, I can assign key people tasks because I can depend on them. Being able to do so makes it easier because I can't and won't do everything." This finding contradicts the Komives, et al. (2005) postulation that leaders in positional roles invite shared responsibility: participants in my study assigned tasks to positional members based on their titles and accompanying position-based expectations in each organization type, not because shared group work was a priority.

Finally, participants were aware of transitioning into the workforce upon graduating and saw predominantly White organizations, for the most part, as places where networking could prove advantageous to their professional development. In two instances, participants joined historically Black organizations that served as places of cultural and professional development with missions directly connected to their engineering majors. These general motivations were shaped by the micro-organizational climates of each organization, whether historically Black or predominantly White, and ultimately influenced participants' responses to leadership and members.

**Mentoring**

Participants discussed the benefits afforded them through receiving mentoring from organizational advisors. This phenomenon occurred across organizations and served to build participants' confidence as developing leaders through encouragement, willingness to create supportive relationships, and empathy exhibited during participants' failures. This point is illustrated by Hazel, who stated, "Our advisor is the best mentor! She's great at critiquing me as a leader, which helps me give others good feedback." For all participants, advisors' guidance served as a catalyst for their leadership development, which supports Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella and Osteen's (2006) suggestion that, "Students need advisors and mentors to provide a safe place for them to reflect and make meaning of their experiences" (p. 415). In many ways, advisor interactions reflected a supportive climate, where leaders experienced nurturing, and advisor relationships served as valuable sources of experiential wisdom. Furthermore, faculty also advised participants in capacities not limited to academic mentoring (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Parks, 2000). To this point Barack stated: "Dr. Washington helps me with a variety of things, but he's especially concerned about how I should carry myself as a Black male. For him, image is everything…" Holistic mentoring, as perceived by Barack, speaks to research offered by Campbell, et al. (2012) stating that the process of mentoring or the way mentors engage mentees has overall positive effects on socially responsible leadership capacity, which reinforce self-improvement among college students.

Participants often mentioned how their confidence as a leader increased with each completed event, the successes of their mentees and the achievement of organizational agendas. Participants talked about how, through continued leadership experiences, they

began to further believe in their abilities to lead. This increased belief in their leadership ability was based on the notion that "leadership efficacy is a specific form of efficacy associated with the level of confidence in the knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with leading others" (Hannah, et al., 2008, p. 1).

**Leader efficacy**

Although their leader efficacy was enhanced by their involvement in leadership roles, how participants framed it varied based on organizational context. For instance, participants reveled in the accomplishment of organizational tasks that supported the cultural elevation or social awareness of African American people when leading in historically Black organizations, especially if those tasks had political implications. "My most successful event was registering incoming Black freshman to vote," stated Shawn, while Eady was ecstatic about using the NAACP to inform Black students about pivotal community issues like racial profiling to: "prevent our students from having a Travon Martin moment. If we can raise campus awareness about issues that are important to our community then I've done my job as a leader!" In contrast, while leading in predominantly White organizations, participants' leader efficacy was tied to peer acknowledgments more than a need to conduct culturally relevant programming. Shawn's example of peer support speaks to this point: "Hearing them [Whites] talk about how I've boosted morale within our residence hall means a lot because there's been racial divides that we needed to overcome and I think my being Black played a role in bettering the situation."

More importantly, as stated by participants, the enhancement of leader efficacy

was directly connected to the accomplishment of a variety of tasks related to determining goals, planning a course of action and working until completion. The desire to complete tasks, as a function of enhancing leader efficacy, aligns with research by Logue, Hutchens and Hector (2005) who associate these motivations with the theme of "action" taken by student leaders in order to "get things done" (p. 402). Applying "action" as a means for qualifying leaders' efficacy and personally measuring participants' leadership, was experienced by each participant who also associated the completion of tasks with program attendance of members and peer affirmation. In fact, the more participants accomplished, the more eager they mentioned they were to participate in leadership roles because "the more I accomplish, the more I want to accomplish. If people keep showing up, I'll keep showing out! If the organization is successful, I know I'm successful." (Martin). This was especially true for those student leaders who were associated with Greek organizations, which supports Astin's (1993) claim that membership in Greek-letter organizations positively affects student involvement in general and also confirms Kimbrough and Hutcheson's (1998) assertion that students who are in Greek letter organizations are more involved in leadership roles than those who are not. To this point, although there were only four participants who were associated with Greek letter organizations they accounted for 15 of 41 organizations in which students were involved leaving the remaining 26 organizations divided among the other 8 participants.

As participants led in a variety of racialized organizational contexts the ways in which they experienced leader efficacy enhancement was highly influenced by the race of their constituents. A particularly intriguing observation was participants' language usage when discussing their contextual leadership experiences. Participants used terms like

"family," "us," and "my people" when describing their African American peers, but used "them," "they," and "in their organizations" when referring to their interactions with White colleagues. The term "colleagues" was mentioned by some participants, but only when referring to White students. This noteworthy semantic difference is relevant because it indicates levels of cultural acknowledgment with same-race peers, yet purposefully differentiates the way participants see White peers as clearly not "family" and different culturally. Although this finding confirms the notion of fictive kinships found by African American college attendees (Herndon & Hirt, 2004), it does so at the exclusion of Whites by not having them considered as included in "family" relationships. This said, it is important to note that those participants who had supportive relationships with White organizational advisors often spoke highly of them and the value of their mentoring.

**Leadership styles**

According to the participants' narratives, both servant and transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Russell & Stone, 2002) emerged as ways of leading based on the racial-make up and contextual types of participants' organizations (e.g., cultural versus professional). Although these leadership styles are distinctly different, participants utilized both based on a variety of factors including the racial climate at the micro-organizational level. Participants leading in historically Black organizations placed followers' needs above their own, a trait central to a servant leader. Contrarily, when leading in predominantly White organizations, participants focused on changing organizational dynamics first and foremost over satisfying followers' needs, a trait central

to transformational leadership.

> In considering this overarching finding, it is important to note: transformational leadership incorporates a greater emphasis upon production because the leader has a stronger focus on organizational objectives. On the other hand, servant leadership involves a higher concern for people because the primary focus of the leader is upon his or her followers" (Stone, Russell & Patterson, 2004, p. 356).

To clearly explain the nuanced differences between participants' contextualized leadership, I differentiate between narratives with regard to how they exhibited servant and transformational ways of leading. Although each participant was cognizant of their race and the race of their constituents, within each organizational context, they purposefully transitioned between enacting servant and transformational leadership.

Based on the data analysis, 5 of the participants (Malcolm, Eady, Barbara, Shawn and Jo Anne) each of whom served as organization president, enacted both servant and transformational leadership in their positional roles. Malcolm talked about the significance of serving African American peers when he stated "as the president of AFRO AM I'm here to guide the will of the members, because this ain't a dictatorship. I'm honored to lead because I'm here to serve my people." Eady also saw serving as an honor in her historically Black organization: "To me, the NAACP legacy is beyond me, beyond the University of Southern. It's about making sure Black students on this campus aren't exploited or left out. I'm eager and grateful to serve as president." Based on her experiences, Shawn felt that fulfilling the desires of her African American peers was a pressing issue, stating "It's my responsibility to make sure Black freshmen know about everything the University of Southern has to offer. If they get lost it's my fault so I try to gather the information based on their interest." In contrast, Barbara, who was the only African American president of a predominantly White organization, was mindful of

attempting to push her organization towards transformation by diversifying: “I run this so I have a secret agenda to be more inclusive, which is less about what they [White peers] want and more about educating people about difference and using this organization to do so.” Although Barbara used her position to transform her predominantly White organization, neither she, nor any other participant mentioned having a desire to “serve” members in organizations that were not historically Black.

Related to transformational leadership, participants often referred to changing or transforming their predominantly White organizations for the betterment of members the campus at large. In part, the desire to change these organizations was due to perceptions that the campus racial climate was not supportive of diversity, or African American students. This perception was similar on the micro-organizational level because “although my White peers are cool, they don’t always get it [racial differences] and sometimes get too comfortable and need to get put back in their place,” (Malcolm). Consequently, in order to accomplish outcomes like organizational diversity in predominantly White organizations participants like Ruby used their influence as leaders to make certain “the mission stays intact because some people have a false sense of entitlement so they need to be reminded that it’s not about them, it’s about the organization; mostly White males, they act like the world is theirs!” Notwithstanding participants’ desire to transform their predominantly White organizations, only Hazel discussed wanting to transform historically Black organizations in ways that placed the individual needs of members secondary to organizational agendas because she saw the need for these organizations to be more open to diversity.

Ultimately, participants learned how utilize both servant and transformational

leadership interchangeably, which led to their ability to practice biracial, cultural leadership that was heavily influenced by organizational context (i.e., cultural versus professional). Participants experienced an unexpected sense of belonging in predominantly White organizations and an increasing desire to preserve African American culture when leading historically Black organizations, which increased their on-campus involvement (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1993).

**Study limitations**

This comparative, qualitative case study had three specific limitations. First, transferability to other institutions may be difficult because each case is grounded in complex ahistorical and contextual situations with specific conceptual structures, uses and problems (Stake, 2005). Second, numerous participants were leaders in the same historically Black organizations, which contributed to their comfort and ability to lead in same-race leadership positions with a shared familiarity. This was not the case in predominantly White organizations, where limited familiarity with peer leaders was one of the reasons why they felt less comfortable leading. Third because of my insider status as an African American student, and native of Oklahoma, who graduated from Southern University and worked at Southern State University, participants may have communicated their narratives in a way that would relate to my personal experiences as a leader, as opposed to telling unfiltered, purposely relatable stories about their lived experiences.

Despite these limitations, the study's strengths are found in participants' descriptions of the variety and fluidity of leadership types utilized in their leader roles.

Participants felt that although they needed to be involved on campus, engagement in leadership roles often served as a source of trepidation and fulfillment, which influenced how they led in each micro-organizational context. Additionally, because I attended the University of Southern during pursuit of my master's, while working at Southern State University, I was familiar with the campuses and understood the historic and structural context of each institution. I was also aware of the legacies of historically Black organizations, which made it easier to ask informed queries about participants' experiences within specific micro-organizational contexts. My insider status as a former undergraduate, graduate and doctoral leader in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations allowed me to relate with students and develop a collegial rapport throughout interviews, observations and focus groups.

Additionally, interviewing participants at two separate institutions was a strength of the study, because it allowed for the comparison of leadership experiences across different locations, campus climates and micro-organizational contexts. This created a richer understanding of how participants perceived each campus and micro-organizational climate, which served as the foundation from which themes emerged. Subsequently, although the overarching campus climates were similar, the micro-organizational climates were practically the same across institutional type. In fact, participants enjoyed the cultural commonalities found in historically Black organizations, but were also frustrated with having to overcome stereotypes in historically White organizations. These phenomena were experienced at both institutions, and although nuanced, affected the ways participants led.

**Implications for practice**

Findings from this study inform higher education administrators, advisors and staff about how African American undergraduates experience leadership differently based on contextualized micro-organizational racial climates. The findings from this study describe the influence of racial identity and micro-organizational climate on the leadership experiences of African American students who are involved on predominantly White institutional campuses.

The African American student leaders in this study experienced feelings of comfort and alienation in both historically Black and predominantly White organizations. When asked why they led in each type of organization the answers varied, but dealt with securing cultural connectedness (Black) and professional network building (White). Ensuring that African American student leaders are first connected culturally, and then aligned with major areas of interest, increases the likelihood of their racial and academic adjustment (Flowers, 2004; Guiffrida, 2003; Museus, 2008). I suggest that PWIs develop an African American incoming freshman leadership summit that facilitates both cultural and academic alignment while highlighting the various leadership opportunities available on campus. It is imperative to inform African American students about the historic and structural legacies of their PWIs, as well as current African American transfer and graduation rates. At the summit, African American students could gather valuable insights about with whom to work, and opportunities to lead, and meet peers and colleagues from a variety of cultural and leadership backgrounds.

Practitioners can also contribute to the persistence of African American student leaders by serving as mentors, and letting students know support is not just limited to

persons of color. Therefore, a second recommendation for practice is that White administrators actively seek out African American student leaders by attending their organizational meetings. In effort to be seen as genuine in wanting to facilitate African American student success on campus, building a rapport would require that administrators spend time developing face-to-face relationships with African American students. Secondly, in order for these students to be mentored, they must see practitioners leading in applicable, real-life situations. To experience mentoring, students must be invited to the offices of deans, associate vice presidents and department directors, and challenged to come up with solutions to institutional problems such as low numbers of students of color at PWIs. Asking for the opinions of African American student leaders can communicate the message that PWIs value their cultural presence, which has not historically been the case (Cuyjet, 1997; Fleming, 1984; Watson & Kuh, 1996). Espousing and actualizing the value of African American student leaders' participation in issues that affect the entire campus will likely attract additional leaders of color and White students who are interested in working cooperatively to increase diversity. Participants in this study found the leadership mentoring of organizational advisors who served in administrative capacities beneficial. A concerted effort to engage African American student leaders, as administrative mentors, will help build students' leadership capacities.

Understanding the extent to which African American student leaders must negotiate their racial and leadership identities based on micro-organizational climate and constituents is extremely important. Student affairs practitioners must stay abreast of those reasons and rationales prior to asking African American student leaders to

participate in leadership roles at PWIs. In fact, practitioners must invest the time to build intimate rapports with these leaders to garner the trust necessary for them to talk openly about their leadership experiences. African American student leaders need to know that leadership involvement does not mean sacrificing their authentic identities to appease peers, colleagues or administrators. Student affairs professionals must be multiculturally competent to engage in these discussions, which means one-on-one student interactions are needed along with diversity training. Finally, African American student leaders should not to be made to feel militant or less Black because they express their "Blackness" in a variety of leadership contexts or have inclusive organizational agendas. Practitioners can facilitate this by encouraging the expression of Black cultural attributes, celebrations, and ways of leading, while also understanding that being pro-Black does not mean African American students are anti-White.

**Implications for policy**

Findings from this study inform higher education institutions about how African American undergraduates experience leadership across campuses, and within student organizations. The findings from this study also demonstrate the influence that pre-college leadership exposure, assumed locations of organizational and institutional resources, and campus climate have on the leadership experiences of African American students who lead while attending predominantly White institutions.

In order to facilitate institutional fit for African American student leaders, PWIs must closely consider the intersection of race and precollege leadership identities of African American students, as well as the depths to which these students are racially

socialized by their families (Herndon & Hirt, 2004; Jackson, 2001). In order to explore this intersection, PWIs should offer a survey asking incoming African American students about their precollege leadership exposure or desire to lead on campus. This could be accomplished by posing questions like, "upon being admitted how involved would you be in leadership roles on campus?" Once those African American students are flagged as interested in leading, student affairs practitioners can facilitate their leadership integration by introducing them to African American faculty and administrators who hold leadership positions on campus. To illustrate, student affairs practitioners could route African American engineering student leaders to same-race peer leaders or African American organizations like the National Society of Black Engineers. Because administrators often serve as the first point of contact for students it is important that they are informed about African American and cultural resources on campus, so they can accurately share that information. This leads to a second policy requiring new-hire and current administrators to participate in multicultural competency training to become educated and knowledgeable about cultural and mainstream resources, and key persons and organizations that have been historically welcoming to African American students and other students of color. In identifying African American students who want to lead, PWIs will positively impact their persistence (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1993) by directly facilitating on-campus involvement that serves as a catalyst for their engagement.

The third institutional policy involves the examination of macro- and micro-organizational climates, which are both conducive to the acceptance and encouragement of African American student leadership and possibly hostile. Specifically, a campus racial climate assessment of student organizations, within the overarching campus

climate, should be conducted with a focus on the narratives of elected leaders and members. Although subjective, determining which micro-organization climates are the safest would inform students' choices to become involved with certain organizations. This would allow student leaders to conduct self-assessments of their own organizations, and help potential members decide where they want to follow or lead based on how they perceive they would "fit in" culturally with the least amount of cultural harm (Tinto, 1993; Tierney, 1992). This would likely facilitate valuable sociocultural interactions between students who may have not interacted otherwise (Dugan & Komives, 2010; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Sekaquaptewa & Thompson, 2002) due to staying within areas of cultural familiarity, perhaps leading to cross-racial fictive kin relationships (Herndon & Hirt, 2004). A larger number of African American students participating in varied leadership roles would increase the opportunities to eliminate stereotypes about Blacks while allowing White students to be exposed to culturally different and relevant ways of leading. Additionally, a better understanding of why African American students lead in contextually different organizations allows institutions of higher education to work toward increasing inclusivity to bolster institutional diversity.

Finally, this study highlights a need to gain a better understanding of why African American student leaders perceive predominantly White organizations as having greater access to PWI resources than historically Black organizations. Institutions of higher education should examine student organizational funding processes, particularly how student organizations receive university financial backing and the processes involved in assigning organizational advisors. This will inform the extent to which these perceptions influence the type of organizations African American student leaders join. PWIs that

want to facilitate the involvement of African American student leaders should consider creating policies that purposefully develop pipeline opportunities that reinforce financial equity and equality across organizational types. This would ensure that African American student leaders view historically Black organizations as financially viable as predominantly White organizations, with equal access to institutional supports and resources.

**Implications for future research**

This research study helps fill gaps in the research literature around African American student leadership identity development, their motivations for becoming involved as leaders and how they lead based on micro-organizational climate. As mentioned in Chapter I, there is a lack of research intersecting African American student leadership experiences and leader efficacy.

The majority of participants in this study were involved in leadership roles prior to arriving at college due to their desires to be involved and also at the behest of their families. Future research is needed about the familial racial socialization of African American youth and how precollege leadership exposure influences their motivations for joining college organizations and which types. Higher education institutions cannot assume that because students are African American they will join a cultural organization or feel safe there. At the same time, assuming that African American students are uncomfortable in predominantly White organizations is also flawed. In my study parental influence impacted participants' perspectives of their desires to "give back" to the Black community, their belief that they were leaders prior to arriving at college and their desire

to be involved on campus. Is the desire to embrace "Blackness" and become involved in leadership roles drastically different in African American students who lack precollege leadership exposure and are not encouraged to embrace a cultural collective perspective? Another extension of this research would explore how African American student leaders internalize, accept or reject their "Blackness" and to what extent doing so determines which organizations they join or leave.

Additionally, research should compare the experiences of African American women and men attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities to determine the extent to which micro-organizational climate issues pertaining to gender and sexual orientation affect student leadership. Furthermore, researchers should investigate why White students join cultural organizations that are not predominantly White, in order to determine how they experience micro-organizational climates differently from students of color, and explore how the presence of White students in cultural organizations either empowers or silences students of color. Moreover, in effort to determine how students view being able to enact leadership by using social media platforms, specifically, as a way to extend leading by monitoring followers and organizational members, further research needs to be conducted. In doing so, researchers might explore how student leaders view leading on-line versus in-person, and the extent to which they value social media platforms as being helpful in implementing their leadership agendas. Lastly, during this study, President Barack Obama began his second bid for the presidency of the United States of America. Although his experiences of leading a racially diverse constituency are well documented in the media, future research should focus on how biracial students view leading in culturally Black and predominantly White organizations.

**Conclusion**

This dissertation has allowed me to amplify the narratives of 12 African American student leaders in historically Black and predominantly White organizations. In exploring their lived experiences I learned that not only did each micro-organizational climate contribute to their success as leaders, but these climates also challenged them to transcend member and organizational adversity. In fact, their wrestling with how to maintain their "Blackness" under the pressure of eliminating stereotypes while leading was fascinating. Although how to be Black manifested differently across participants, their desires to "give back" to their on- and off-campus communities was a shared commonality based on their individual "Blackness." Furthermore, despite this racial impediment, they all experienced a growth in leader efficacy, which increased the more they led, with each failure and success, regardless of the micro-organizational climate.

Historically Black and predominantly White student organizations can serve as places for African American student leadership development, belonging, professional uplift and social-cultural validation. The 12 participants in this study experienced contextualized micro-organization racial climates that were supportive, encouraging, resistant and challenging, which enhanced their leadership development, contributed to their perception of themselves as successful leaders and enhanced their ability to identify race-based leadership enclaves. Participants emphasized how leading in a contextual manner benefitted not only themselves, but also organization members for a variety of reasons, including facilitating the leadership development of others, learning to identify how to lead based on constituents and experiencing the value of peer influences.

I chose this study for my dissertation because I wanted to know how macro-

institutional and micro-organizational affected the motivation, involvement and depth of participation in cultural and noncultural organizations. Additionally, because I have led in historically Black and predominantly White organizations, I wanted to know to what extent participants' experiences paralleled my own as a student leader. I found key similarities concerning using cultural organizations as buffers to racism, and predominantly White organizations as vehicles for career advancement. However, I did not experience being culturally rebuffed because I was active in a variety of contextually different student organizations. Hopefully these research findings will empower African American student leaders, and student affairs practitioners and institutional policy makers to develop programming and policies that allow for the engagement of students in the future regardless of race and micro-organizational climate.

# APPENDIX A

# LETTER OF INTRODUCTION OF STUDY

02.15.12

Mr. Martin M. Du Bois
701 NE 79th Pl.
Oklahoma City, OK 73114

Re: Soul of Leadership: African American Students' Experiences in Historically Black and Predominately White Organizations Interviews and Focus Group Study Opportunity

Dear Mr. Du Bois:

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about how African American students experience leadership in historically Black and predominately White organizations in college. This study is being conducted by Bryan K. Hotchkins, an African American doctoral candidate at the University of Utah, in effort to provide an opportunity to gather your valued perspective about your lived experiences as a student leader.

I am contacting you for this study through the University of Utah and your institution.

This letter is an attempt to solicit your participation in two interviews and a focus group that will potentially yield valuable information about African American student leadership experiences. Additionally, if you have interest in participating it does not mean that you are automatically enrolled for the study until you sign a consent form.

If you would like additional information about this study, please call Bryan K. Hotchkins at 405.826.3492 or e-mail at bryan.hotchkins@utah.edu.

In closing, I would like to thank you for considering this research opportunity, hopefully your story will provide insight toward helping institutions of higher education better support African American student leaders.

Sincerely,

Bryan K. Hotchkins
Doctoral Candidate
University of Utah
Educational Leadership and Policy Department

# APPENDIX B

# INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

IRB STUDY: 00055617

**Interview Protocol**

Sample Questions (Interview #1):

*What motivates African American students to join historically Black and predominantly White organizations?*

1) Why did you join your current on-campus organization?

2) Tell me about how you became a leader in your current organization...

3) Why did you take on your 'elected' leadership position?

4) What is your position?

5) Are you compensated for either leadership position?

6) Did the racial make-up of your organization influence your joining? Explain.

*How do African American students experience being leaders in historically Black and predominantly White organizations?*

1) How do you feel when leading on any given day?

2) What about your organization contributes to your ability to lead?

3) What about your organization takes away from your ability to lead?

4) About your peers, how do they respond to your leadership?

5) About your peers, how do you think they see your ability to lead?

6) Tell me about the organization's advisor. How do they support (or not) your leading? Explain.

7) How do you think the organization advisor sees your leadership ability?

8) How would organization officers describe your leadership?

*How is African American student leader efficacy influenced by leadership in historically Black and predominantly White organizations?*

1) Describe an experience that gave you the confidence to lead?

2) Who has helped you to become a leader? How?

3) What is your most valuable leadership quality? What is the quality that needs work?

4) How do you know your way of leadership is working?

5) What makes you believe in your leadership ability?

6) How much confidence do you have in your ability to lead?

Sample Questions (Interview #2):

1) How do you define leadership?

2) Do you consider yourself a leader?

3) How do you think being African American is perceived in your leadership?

4) On your campus, do you think there are enough students of color who are leaders? In leadership roles in historically Black versus predominately White organizations.

5) How do you use social media to lead?

6) How do you see yourself as a future leader, after graduation?

7) What type of lasting affect on people to you want to have as a leader?

8) Which organization(s) do you like most? Why?

Sample Questions (Interview #3—Focus group):

1) How has your organizations prepared you to be a global leader?

2) Why do you think leadership in the Black community is important?

3) How does being involved in organizations affect your ability to stay in college?

4) What have you done as a leader to get others to lead?

5) Who, on-campus, is your role model for leadership?

6) How do you or "is the Black" experience being "Black" on campus?

7) What could the university do in order to help Black students become involved in leadership?

8) How do you measure your success as a leader?

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